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INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONTENT: A NEW ALIGNMENT¹

abstract

The debate about mental content is not well framed as internalists versus externalists, because there is both internal and external mental content. There is also a question about how best to draw the line between them, and this paper argues that this line is not usually drawn in the right place. It proposes a new alignment: the expression ‘internal content’ is to be taken to denote actually occurring, concrete, immediately phenomenologically given content. Absolutely everything else that can be said to be the content of experience is to be classified as external content. It turns out, under this new alignment, that internal content can be external content; this is the case when I think about your pain, or indeed my own pain. But this is as it should be.

keywords

Mental content; Intentionality; Representation; Aboutness; Phenomenology

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1. Introduction

There's an old question:

Q1 What is the relation between mind and world?

It's a bad question in so far as it suggests any opposition between mind and world, because minds are wholly part of the world. The same goes for the question

Q2 What is the relation between mind and reality?

– for the same reason. It's hardly an improvement to ask

Q3 What is the relation between mind and that part of reality ('the world') which is other than mind?

for if one takes this as one's principal question one may find it hard to take adequate account of the respects in which mind, a part of reality, can and does relate to itself in ways that are in crucial respects exactly the same as the ways in which it relates to other parts of reality. I can think about my current anxiety just as I can think about India.

A slightly better question, perhaps, is

Q4 What is the relation between a particular individual mind – i.e. an individual locus of conscious experience – and that vast part of reality (which includes other minds) which is other than that particular mind?

but similar doubts arise even when we narrow things down in this way (after having assumed that we can satisfactorily individuate 'minds'). This is because there are fundamental respects in which individual minds relate to themselves, or parts of themselves, very much as they relate to parts of reality other than themselves. When we ask how an individual mind or locus of conscious experience m relates to 'the world', we're often principally interested in how m relates to things in general, but things in general certainly include m itself. So too, when we're interested in the relations minds enter into, we're nearly always principally interested in *representational* relations, or *intentional* relations, or *content* relations. But there's no good reason to exclude m itself from among the things with which it can enter into such relations.

We can narrow things further and ask:

Q5 What is the relation between a particular mental occurrence, a particular episode of experience e_1 , and the vast part of reality which is other than e_1 ?

This is another small improvement, I think, if only because we may give unnecessary hostages to fortune if we start talking about minds (as in Q4) as if they were neatly individuatable things. (I'm not saying we can give precise identity conditions for episodes of experience.) But the same sort of question arises about Q5 as about Q4. If one is principally interested in the general question of what sorts of relations with reality a particular experience e_1 can enter into, whether it's a conscious thought or a perception or a sensation or an emotion, why start out by excluding e_1 itself from consideration? It may be said that an experience can't be about itself, but this is not so. I can think *this very thought is puzzling* – a thought that I find to be true when I think it.¹

We can narrow things further still, and ask

Q6 What is the relation between an experience considered at a given moment – call the portion of experience so considered e^* – and the vast part of reality which is other than e^* ? (By 'moment' I mean a very short period of time.)

I think that it can be helpful – interesting and important – to ask this question in certain philosophical contexts, but the same question arises about Q6 as about Q5. If one's principal interest is in the general question of what relations with reality a particular moment of experience e^* can enter into, why exclude e^* itself from consideration? Perhaps the better question is simply this:

Q7 What is the relation between e^* and reality considered as a whole – the universe?

There are two immediate answers. e^* obviously stands in the part-whole relation to reality considered as a whole. It also stands in the relation or pseudo-relation of identity to the part of reality it is itself. But these answers aren't very interesting. When philosophers ask about relations between particular experiences and reality in general they are as already remarked usually interested in intentional relations, representational relations, content relations. They want an answer to the question

Q8 What is it for an experience to *represent* something? What is it for it to be an experience of something? What is it for it to be *about* something?²

In short

Q9 What is it, quite generally speaking, for an experience to have *content*? And what is it for it to have the particular content it does?

In what follows I'm going to take Q9 to embrace all the questions that make up Q8.

¹ Like many – from Aristotle to Brentano and on – I think that there's a fundamental respect in which every experience is about itself as well as whatever else it is about. I'll put this aside until §17.

² 'An experience about x ' sounds odd, but conscious thoughts, dreams, and so on are experiences, and are naturally said to be about something.

2. Mental Content

**3. Internal Content
Is Concretely
Existing Content**

What sorts of mental content are there? There's a familiar distinction between *internal* and *external* content. I want to try to adjust it. It's certainly not satisfactory to take 'external content' in the way that many do – to cover all things that exist in what is conventionally known as 'the external world'. Nor is it enough to add on things like numbers and concepts. I think there's a natural way of understanding the notion of internal content according to which all the kinds of mental content that are usually divided into internal and external are most properly classified as external, while the term 'internal content' is reserved for phenomenological content *considered as a concretely existing phenomenon*. I'll mark off this new notion of internal content by giving it a capital letter – 'Internal content' – and shortening this to 'I-content'.

[1] The I-content of e_1 is its phenomenological content *considered as a concretely existing phenomenon*

and therefore not considered as a potentially shareable or repeatable *type* of content. Absolutely everything else that can be legitimately counted as the content of e_1 is external. I'll give this new notion of external content a capital letter – 'External content' – and shorten this to 'E-content'. Two things can be said straight away. First, that all shareable content is E-content, second, that the E-content of any given experience can exist without that experience existing.³

Objection. 'You can do this if you want, but what's the point? Your distinction is very different from the standard distinction, and philosophers are so used to the standard distinction that they will have difficulty understanding what you say.'

Reply. I think, and am going to argue, that the current line between external and internal is superficial, and that its superficiality is preventing us from getting a suitably general account of what ultimately most concerns us in this debate.

Suppose I arrive with a bucket and you ask me what it contains – what its content is. I tell you: potatoes. Relative to this specification of content, my bucket has the same content as many other buckets – shareable content. Now I show you the potatoes and say 'these potatoes' – which no other bucket contains. This is concretely existing content. Occurrent mental content is concretely existing content in the same sense. It is of course, and necessarily, content of a certain qualitative type, and is therefore potentially reduplicable, but that is no surprise. Every concretely existing entity is necessarily of some qualitative type, and hence potentially reduplicable.

You're right that the conception of internal mental content specified in [1] – I-content – is quite different from the conception of internal content that is standard in analytic philosophy, according to which internal content is essentially shareable. So what follows may not be of much interest to most analytic philosophers. But I think it's worth a look.

Let e_1 be an ordinary, vivid, veridical human perceptual experience of a river flowing under a bridge. The first thing to say is that like any ordinary human *perceptual* experience (rather than a putative *merely sensory* experience), e_1 is a richly *cognisensory* episode.⁴ It's as much a matter of *cognitive experience*, or *cognitive phenomenology*, or most generally *non-sense-feeling*

³ This kind of externality is central to what G. E. Moore was getting at in his 1903 paper 'The Refutation of Idealism'.

⁴ For this useful word, see Albahari (2019, p. 7). I'm accepting for purposes of discussion an old distinction between sensation and perception according to which sensation considered just as such is non-cognitive and all perception is essentially cognitive as well as sensory – hence 'cognisensory'. 'Perception is in effect an implicit proposition: it is as if we said, There is an existent whose character is so and so' (Strong, 1930, p. 17).

phenomenology, as it is of *sense-feeling* phenomenology.⁵ I like to think that almost all of us might be able to agree about this.

What is e_1 's *I-content*? It's the totality of e_1 's concretely occurrent, irreducibly cognisensory phenomenological content – the totality of e_1 's concretely occurrent, irreducibly cognisensory phenomenological *being*. I'll call it '*c*'. It's a token of a certain extremely specific content-type *C*. *c* is everything about e_1 in virtue of which e_1 can be completely phenomenologically (contentfully) identical to a numerically distinct experience e_2 . But it is itself trivially ('logically') unshareable. One pea can't be another qualitatively identical pea. So too *c*, the *I-content* of e_1 can't be the *I-content* of e_2 , *I-content* is an essentially private matter.

I think this is exactly what one would have supposed 'internal mental content' to be on first encountering the term, if one hadn't been exposed to the debate about internal and external content in recent analytic philosophy of mind.

What is e_1 's *E-content*? It's not just the river and the bridge, with whatever other features of the surrounding environment are experientially apprehended. This is because *C*, the complex, cognisensorily rich content-type of which e_1 is a *token* concrete instance, is also part of its *external* content.⁶ *C* is certainly not any sort of concretely existing entity of a sort that could be a concrete part of e_1 (e_1 is itself a wholly concrete entity). It is, if you like, a (repeatable) 'universal'. It's what Santayana calls an 'essence'. It's a *phenomenological* essence.⁷

If you blink, when looking at the scene, and are transported, during your blink, to the exactly corresponding position on Perfect Twin Earth (where water is H_2O), then your post-blink experience e_2 not only has different *E-content* from pre-blink experience e_1 (river and bridge). It also has different *I-content*; even when e_1 and e_2 are phenomenologically identical. If, more mundanely, you blink here on Earth, in such a way that your pre- and post-blink experiences are phenomenologically identical, your two experiences have the same *E-content* but different *I-content*.

On this view, *all* traditional internal content (all 'Twin-shareable content') classifies as external – as *E-content*. It isn't *E-content* because it's a physical object out there in what is standardly called 'the external world', the world of tables and chairs. Nor is it *E-content* because it's a concretely existing entity that is ontologically distinct from the concretely existing entity that is your current experience even though it's *not* out there in 'the external world' as ordinarily understood (as when you think about your current pain). *C*, the shareable content of e_1 , is neither of these things. It's external simply because it's not part of the actual concrete stuff or being of e_1 ; because it's a type of experience, not a concrete instance or token of experience. The mere fact that traditional internal content is shareable is sufficient to show that it's external, as remarked. However it's best classified ontologically, *C* is not an inseparable part of e_1 . This is so even though it's essential to e_1 's being the experience it is, with the *I-content* (i.e. *c*) that it actually has, that it has precisely the traditional internal content (i.e. *C*) it has.

5 For discussion see Strawson (2011), where I introduce the notion of non-sense-feeling or 'NSF' phenomenology to secure a conveniently exclusive and exhaustive distinction between two fundamental types of phenomenology.

6 We can take e_1 to be *s*'s *total experiential field* at *t*, so that its content, *c*, includes all somatosensory content, mood content, and so on.

7 Santayana's notion of essence varies over time (see Sprigge, 1995), and is very different from the current notion, but it is as I understand it extremely useful. The fundamental contrast Santayana has in mind is the traditional one between *essence* and *existence*, not the distinction between what is essential and what is contingent. The *essence* of a thing *x* is everything there is to (the intrinsic being of) *x*, considered at any given time, *other than its actual existence*. It's everything about it, including everything we would normally classify as contingent, that is repeatable. It's well defined by C.A. Strong and W.P. Montague as 'the entire what of a thing, without its existence' (Strong, 1918, p. 38), everything about a thing that 'can be conceived as duplicable' (Montague, 1938, p. 576).

- 4. Moore and Blue** I'll vary the point by considering Moore's 1903 example of an experience of blue. By 'blue' I mean, like Moore, blue conceived of in the ordinary way as a directly visually apprehensible qualitative character. I'll mark this meaning/use with a capital letter: Blue, and consider a specific shade of it, Blue57. Certainly, then, Blue57 is not out there in the external world of tables and chairs (Science 101). It is for all that a matter of external content relative to my current Blue57 experience. How so? Because my Blue57 current experience is a concrete token instance of a type of experiential content whose existence doesn't depend in any way on the existence of my experience or indeed anyone else's experience. I believe this is why Moore thought that the example of the experience of Blue was sufficient to refute idealism. It refutes idealism *even if Blue is concretely exemplifiable (able to exist in the universe) only in experience*, i.e. only as a determinate mode of the general determinable experience; as is I believe the case.
- I think that the current philosophical discussion of mental content is way off course, and that the misdirection has come to be built in to reflex ways of taking certain key words. So I'm not optimistic about being understood. So I may as well declare my hand further (this may give you a sufficient reason to stop reading, whether because you're dismayed, or relieved that you don't have to take me seriously): I take it to be true as a matter of fact that Blue57 concretely exists when and only when certain experiential episodes occur, experiential episodes that have a certain experiential-qualitative character. It then exists as a ('fully objective') property of these episodes, in such a way that it's perfectly acceptable – straightforwardly true – to say two things that we have been told we should never say on pain of preposterousness. The first is that the experiential episodes are themselves – quite literally – Blue57. The second is that the Blue57 exists – concretely exists – in the brain. It's certainly not 'out there' in the world (Science 101 again). The neurophysiologist will obviously not have Blue57 experience when examining the relevant part of the brain of someone having Blue57 experience, but no one should expect that. The *type* Blue57 – the thing with respect to which your and my experience can be qualitatively identical – does not (of course) concretely exist at all. And it is in itself – Moore's point again – something wholly non-mental. It's wholly non-mental even though (again) Blue57 can only ever concretely exist in the universe as the (I-)content of something mental: a conscious experience.
- 5. Restriction to Experience** Philosophers freely attribute content to many things that invite classification under the heading *mental phenomenon*, including so-called dispositional mental states like beliefs and preferences. I believe one needs to be very careful about this, if only because there's an important way of thinking about the mental according to which dispositional phenomena don't qualify as contentful mental phenomena at all (only conscious occurrences do). I'm not going to consider this here, however.⁸ I'm simply going to continue to restrict attention to *experiences*, using the plural-accepting count noun 'experience' to cover all mental phenomena that are both *occurrent* and *conscious* and (therefore)⁹ *phenomenologically contentful*. I'll use the plural-lacking mass term 'experience' as a general term for the phenomenological content or experiential-qualitative character or experiential 'what-it's-like' of experiences.¹⁰ I'll also assume that materialism or physicalism is true, i.e. that every concrete existent is wholly physical.¹¹

8 See e.g. Strawson (1994, §6.6), Gertler (2007); also Loar (1987; 2003); also Schlick (1925).

9 Whatever 'pure consciousness experience' is, it can't be entirely contentless and also experience.

10 I am in other words going to use it to mean what many mean by 'consciousness'. Note that the plural-accepting count noun 'experience' denotes episodes that may be supposed to have non-experiential qualities in addition to experiential qualities. (I use 'quality' in a traditional way as a perfectly general term for any sort of intrinsic property.)

11 I follow Lewis (1994, p. 293) in treating 'materialism' and 'physicalism' as synonymous, although there's more to physical being than matter. I take it that materialism has *nothing to do* with any sort of doubt about or denial of the

Question. How can one hope to get a satisfactory general account of mental content if one restricts attention to occurrent mental phenomena, and indeed to conscious occurrent mental phenomena?

Five replies. First, it's often a good idea to try to give an account of a limited class of instances of a phenomenon and then see if it generalizes to other instances.

Second, and as remarked, there's an important case to be made for the view that only conscious mental phenomena – experiences – can really or strictly speaking be said to have mental content.

The third reply develops the second: even if one allows that there are *occurrent* mental phenomena that can be rightly said to be genuinely mentally contentful in spite of the fact that they're not conscious, there's an extremely serious difficulty (a straightforwardly metaphysical difficulty) in the idea that non-conscious *dispositional* mental phenomena can literally be said to have mental content.¹²

The fourth reply arises from taking the second and third seriously. It may be a mistake to assume in advance that the correct account of mental content will apply to both conscious and non-conscious mental phenomena in a unified fashion. This assumption may force one into a series of Procrustean manoeuvres whose Procrustean nature may remain invisible to one because one hasn't sufficiently examined one's commitment to the assumption. More generally, one shouldn't assume in advance that one knows the extension of the class of things to which a notion has proper application. One may go wrong because one is wrong about that extension. This is one reason why it can be better to start with a class of cases one is certain about and then see if one's proposal can be extended to other cases.

The fifth and balancing reply is that in some cases, and on some conceptions of what mental content is, generalization from occurrent cases to non-occurrent cases is easy and evident.

Having restricted the discussion to experiences and assumed the truth of physicalism, I should say that I'm an *outright realist* about experience. I'm a *real* realist about experience. I say this because some self-styled physicalists who claim to be realists about experience are really no such thing. Real realists about experience don't try to avoid the issue of experience in the way some self-styled physicalists do, by doubting or overtly or covertly denying or otherwise discounting the reality of the most certainly known general natural fact about reality: the fact of (conscious) experience. Real realists about experience hold exactly the same basic general view about the nature of pain, taste experience, colour experience, and so on, as almost all other human beings, and (rightly) see no tension between this view and outright physicalism.¹³ It's true that common sense is dramatically wrong about experiences in various ways.¹⁴ It is for all that entirely correct in its fundamental realism about experience – about the experiential-qualitative or *qualial* character of experiences. "There is but one indefectibly certain truth, and that is

6. Realism about Experience

existence of consciousness or experience. See e.g. Strawson (2021a). (To say that every concrete existent is physical is certainly not to say, obviously falsely, that physics can fully capture or convey the nature or essence of every concrete existent. Physics gives only a highly abstract description of reality, and plainly cannot convey the nature or essence of experience. See e.g. Russell, 1927; Eddington, 1928.)

¹² There are well known difficulties with Searle's (1992) proposed solution. I make a proposal about the best one can do in Strawson (2008, §6).

¹³ All sensible versions of physicalism explicitly deny that physics can say everything there is to say about the physical. This point is central to the doctrine of physicalism as originally introduced by members of the Vienna Circle, all of whom were real realists about consciousness.

¹⁴ It isn't aware of the 'filling-in' phenomena, for example (see e.g. Pessoa & de Weerd, 2003), and often thinks that colour is out there in the world just as we experience it, existing quite independently of minds.

the truth that pyrrhonic scepticism itself leaves standing, – the truth that the present phenomenon of consciousness exists”.¹⁵

7. Cognitive Experience (Cognitive Phenomenology)

Having restricted attention to experiences, conscious occurrent mental phenomena, it’s important not to forget that conscious thoughts are experiential episodes. As such they necessarily have phenomenological content. In particular, they have cognitive-phenomenological content. They may also be said to have non-cognitive phenomenological content, i.e. sense-feeling content of some sort (they can certainly be intimately *accompanied* by sense-feeling content).¹⁶ But they can’t possibly qualify as conscious thoughts, rather than conscious something-elses, if they don’t have specifically cognitive-phenomenological content – where this, like all phenomenology, is wholly a matter of having a certain qualitative/experiential/phenomenological character.¹⁷

I’ll take this point for granted here. To deny the existence of cognitive phenomenology – of specifically cognitive-phenomenological experiential content – is to hold that the total lifelong character of our lived experience – *everything that life is to us experientially* – consists entirely of bare or pure sensation of one kind or another. In this case it must be false (to take one example) to say that one’s anguish at Lucy’s death includes *conscious comprehending believing entertaining* of the proposition that she is dead. I think this is enough to refute the view that there’s no such thing as cognitive phenomenology. What is most striking and painful for ordinary (real) people in such unhappy cases is the way the conscious comprehending believing entertaining of the proposition strikes again and again. It occurs in experience.¹⁸

Another way to put the point is to say that to deny the existence of cognitive phenomenology is to endorse a version of the ‘myth of the given’. It is in effect to commit oneself to the view that what is truly phenomenologically given, in human life, is merely sensory. It’s never anything like: a cow under a tree in a field.

In fact, of course, almost all if not all adult human experience is cognisensory, as already remarked; it’s both cognitive and sensory, undisentanglingly so.¹⁹ The undisentanglingly of the cognitive and the sense-feeling elements is of course wholly compatible with the fact that the distinction between them is entirely proper and theoretically indispensable in a viable general theory of perception. It’s a philosophical mistake to think that any empirical result could ever put this point in question.

8. Cognitive-phenomenological Content and Cognitive Content

There is, then, *cognitive-phenomenological* content or *cognitive-experiential* content. It’s a wholly phenomenological matter, as its name declares, so it’s not at all the same thing as *cognitive* content. It’s important to be clear about the distinction between cognitive-experiential content and cognitive content – the distinction between (for example)

¹⁵ James (1896, pp. 466-467). James most certainly doesn’t deny the existence of consciousness in his 1904 paper ‘Does Consciousness Exist?’. He rejects a certain conception of what it is, in response to Moore’s 1903 paper ‘The Refutation of Idealism’.

¹⁶ I take sense-feeling content to include all interoceptive and exteroceptive sensation and feeling, emotional and mood tone, and so on.

¹⁷ See Montague (2015) for a decisive argument for this conclusion. It’s remarkable that many present-day philosophy of mind have theoretical commitments that – they believe – require them to deny the existence of cognitive phenomenology.

¹⁸ This is not to say that the causation is as it seems in such a case. It feels as if it is (a) the constantly returning conscious comprehending believing entertaining of the proposition that Lucy is dead that produces (b) the repeated physical-emotional shock, but the causation may be different. It may be that (c) the sub-experiential, non-conscious representation of the fact of death produces (b) the physical-emotional shock, which triggers (a) the conscious comprehending entertaining of the fact; or it may be that (c) gives rise to (a) and (b) concurrently. What is not in question is the reality of (a).

¹⁹ I take ‘sensory’ in a wide sense to including all feeling, including all emotional feeling.

[2] *the proposition* that nobody could possibly have had different parents (cognitive content)

and

[3] *the what it's like of comprehendingly thinking or grasping* that nobody could possibly have had different parents (cognitive-experiential content)

– if one is to get clear on the distinction between I-content and E-content. For [2] and [3] are obviously very different things. I'll come back to this.

What is mental content, i.e. (given the restriction adopted in §5) experiential content? I think that one very good answer is this:

[4] the content of an experience is what it is an experience of – everything that it's an experience of.

I take this to be equivalent to

[5] the content of an experience is absolutely everything that is experienced in the having of the experience, everything that is *experientially registered or given in any way*.²⁰

This obviously (trivially) includes all the experience's phenomenological features, as well as anything else that can be said to be registered – a cow, for example, a tree, a field, π The phenomenological features are (necessarily, trivially) part of what is given in the having of the experience, and they are a large part of what will now principally concern me. Plainly the content of an experience – its being a hope or a fear, for example – is more than what the experience is about given the usual understanding of 'aboutness'.²¹

This being so, it's probably worth saying (I feel it shouldn't be necessary, but it may be advisable given the current philosophical climate) that reference to the experiential givenness of the experience's phenomenological features is entirely compatible with the fact that 'the myth of the given' is a myth.²² On this point it's enough to repeat something that has already been said – that the phenomenological given is cognisensory through and through. That already consigns the basic 'myth of the given' to the realm of myth.²³

20 See Montague (2009, p. 497; 2016); also Brentano (1874), at least in part (I don't agree with his original account of what is accessible to consciousness, since he excludes genuinely external objects). I'm putting aside a number of issues about non-phenomenological content. For example: if I see Lucy, I have experience of Lucy, and may be said to have experience of Lucy full stop – Lucy considered as a whole. But there's also a clear sense in which I don't have experience of the side of Lucy that is hidden from me; nor of the electrons that are partly constitutive of Lucy. And so on.

21 There's an interesting line of thought that treats all the content of experience as just defined – all the of-ness of experience – as ultimately a matter of intentionality. On this view, which many will find counterintuitive, a hope that it will rain is correctly said to be intentional with respect to hope as well as rain, simply because it is indeed an experience of hope.

22 On the fact that the myth is a myth see e.g. Locke (1689, 2.9.8), Strong (1923), Sellars (1932), Strawson (2021b).

23 Much more can be said. Rejecting the myth doesn't for example involve denying that colour *considered as a purely phenomenological feature* is experientially given when one sees a buttercup. (It had better not, for if colour weren't so given, one wouldn't see the yellowness of the buttercup.) The point out is simply that the yellowness isn't given/experienced as *being* a purely phenomenological feature.

10. Where Is the Line (between External and Internal)?

I've redefined internal content as I-content. Some may say that I'm simply changing the subject. I think it's worth seeing what happens. It can be difficult to follow what someone is saying when they start using a standard phrase with a non-standard meaning. I hope it helps that I've introduced 'I-content' to denote the content that I think can truly be said to be internal. Whether it helps or not, it allows me to go on using the traditional term 'internal content' in the traditional way – to denote phenomenological-content types that can be multiply instantiated or 'tokened' by different subjects (and that are on my view a matter of E-content). I'll call the traditional scheme of distinction the *Int/Ext scheme*, and the new scheme the *I/E scheme*.

One could simply say that the terms 'internal' and 'external' as standardly used in the Int/Ext scheme are clumsy terms (like 'broad' and 'narrow'), but that it doesn't matter because we know what we mean by them. That's one option. I'm trying something else. (I started this paper when I couldn't get clear about where to draw the line between internal and external content as traditionally conceived.)

Some have tried to draw the distinction by saying that external content is content whose nature can't be specified independently of reference to the so-called external environment, while internal content is content whose nature can in principle be so specified.²⁴ The trouble is that it's not clear what counts as the external environment. It seems that it can't just mean the concrete external environment, given that we think about things like (the concept of) justice or non-existence or the number 2, which are E-content when thought about.²⁵ But the problem remains even when we put justice and 2 aside, and restrict attention to the concrete external environment. For then we face the question: external to what? External to

(a) the concrete reality of the experiencing subject considered as a whole organism?

Obviously not: when I think about my hand, my hand is external content. External then to

(b) the concrete reality of the subject of experience considered specifically in its mental aspects, as a persisting entity that is something less than a whole organism, e.g. a brain or part of a brain?

No: whenever anyone thinks about (b), (b) is external content. External then to

(c) the subject of experience's experiences considered just as phenomenologically qualified episodes?

No. When I think about the pain I experienced yesterday, it's E-content. It is itself concrete phenomenological content, but it's a part of reality that is wholly other than the concrete phenomenological content of my current experience (a thought-experience).

Suppose that I think about my pain today, the pain, *P*, I'm experiencing right now. We can

²⁴ The 'in principle' is heavy, given that traditional internal content, which is by definition shareable between philosophical Twins (my Perfect Twin on Perfect Twin Earth, my Classical Twin on XYZ Earth, my Instant Twin who has just popped into existence), is undisentanglingly *cognisensory* – as much a matter of *cognitive*-phenomenological or *non-sense-feeling* qualitative character as *sense-feeling* character. When I and my Twins have qualitatively identical experience of or as of seeing a cow under a tree in a field, it will be extraordinarily hard to produce an adequate purely qualitative description of the respects in which our experiences are qualitatively identical.

²⁵ Here our thoughts have external content that is fully shared by our philosophical Twins: Twin-shareability is not sufficient for internality.

ask first how *P* classifies on the Int/Ext scheme (the traditional scheme). It is, intuitively, a paradigmatically internal episode, but it's external content relative to my thought about it even on the Int/Ext scheme, just as it is relative to your thought about it. All concrete particulars are external content on the Int/Ext scheme, as already remarked; on that scheme internal content is always and only a matter of types of content.

How does *P* classify on the current I/E scheme? It seems that it gets into the E-content of my current thought just as the Eiffel Tower does – in exactly the same way. It's a concrete particular that is being thought about by me. Is it part of my 'external environment'? Well, it's something in reality that's available to be thought about, to be taken up by my thought, and in that sense it's 'out there'. You can think about it too, right now, as you sympathize with me, although my Twins can't.

It may be said that my current experience is best thought of (or must be thought of) as a unified whole in such a way that both my current pain and my current thought about my current pain are part of it. In that case it seems we have to say that my pain is part of the I-content of my total current experience in occurring as it does, and also part of the E-content of my current experience in being thought about as it is being thought about. Is this a problem? Not at all. I-content becomes E-content every time anyone thinks about any actual experience, whether it's their own or anyone else's. On the unified-whole view of co-occurrent experience, my current pain is part of the E-content of my current overall experience, and also part of its I-content.

The proposal, in sum, is this: in the case of any experience *e*, the best use of the term 'internal content' is to refer to

[6] the actual concrete being of all the actually occurring phenomenological goings on that the existence of *e* involves.

This has been called 'I-content' to distinguish it from the traditional use of 'internal content', but I will now take back the terms 'internal content' and 'external content' for my own use, alongside 'I-content' and 'E-content'. External content is

[7] absolutely everything else (everything other than [6]) that can correctly be said to be part of the content of *e*.

I want now to go through a series of cases that show the proposal in action without adding any new ideas.²⁶

My sister and I are looking at or thinking about the River Cherwell, which I'll call '*r*₁', flowing under the Humpback Bridge, which I'll call '*b*₁', in the University Parks in Oxford. I'll call my token experience *e*₁, and I'll call her token experience *e*₂. I'll put all *names of mental contents* in square brackets, whether they're I-content or E-content.²⁷

*e*₁, my experience of the river and the bridge, has a particular overall experiential-qualitative character. *e*₂, my sister's overall experience of river and bridge, is almost certainly phenomenologically different in some respects, even if we're both just thinking about the

11. The River and the Bridge

²⁶ One certainly shouldn't exclude the 'attitudinal' aspects of an experience – e.g. the fact that it is a hope or a fear – from its mental content, even if one is more interested in other aspects of its content. I fear that many now hear the phrase 'mental content' in such a way that this obvious point doesn't seem obvious. Plainly my fear is part of the overall mental content – the phenomenological content, the being – of my fear.

²⁷ Some of this material appears in Strawson (2011).

bridge, and not actually looking at it (conscious thought is as much a matter of experience as conscious perception, as remarked in §7). I'm experiencing 'Cherwell-River-flowing-under-Humpback-Bridge X-ishly', my sister is experiencing 'Cherwell-River-flowing-under-Humpback-Bridge Y-ishly'. More generally, and eliminating reference to particular rivers and bridges: she's experiencing *F-ish-river-flowing-under-G-ish-bridge* in a Y-ish way, and I'm experiencing *F-ish-river-flowing-under-G-ish-bridge* in an X-ish way.

Let me try to set this out more fully. I'll use capital letters to indicate phenomenological content. I'll put names of actual concrete occurrences (tokens) of phenomenological content in italic capitals to distinguish them from names of types of phenomenological content, which I'll put in bold capitals, and I'll number names of occurrences (tokens) of phenomenological content to indicate that they're numerically distinct.

We can then say that my experience e_1 has token phenomenological content [RBX1].

It is (therefore) a token occurrence of phenomenological content of type [RBX]. My sister's experience e_2 has token phenomenological content [RBY1] and is (therefore) of phenomenological content type [RBY].

Our experiences e_1 and e_2 are probably pretty similar in certain respects, phenomenological-contentwise. But they're probably also different. This is pretty obvious if we're both looking at the river and the bridge, and sensory phenomenological content is involved. It may seem a lot less obvious if only cognitive-experiential content is involved: if we're both simply thinking of the river and the bridge, or both thinking *that the River Cherwell flows under the Humpback Bridge*. I'll say something about this in due course.

Our experiences are obviously identical in one respect, contentwise. They're both of the River Cherwell and the Humpback Bridge, which is made of concrete and iron and is also sometimes known as the Rainbow Bridge. They have traditional E-content in common, which we can call [r1,b1]. But they're different in respect of phenomenological-content type. Mine is of phenomenological content type [RBX], as remarked, and my sister's is of phenomenological content type [RBY].

We can diagram this as follows:

	I	E
e_1	[RBX1]	[r ₁ ,b ₁]
e_2	[RBY1]	[r ₁ ,b ₁]

Where should we put the phenomenological-content types in the diagram? Plainly they're E-content, so we extend the E-content column as follows:

	I	E
e_1	[RBX1]	[r ₁ ,b ₁] [RBX]
e_2	[RBY1]	[r ₁ ,b ₁] [RBY]

All concretely existing phenomenological content, hence all actual I-content, is of course occurrent content. [RBX] and [RBY] are types of I-content, but they're not themselves I-content. They can't be, because they're not occurrent, clockable concrete phenomenological goings-on. Relative to our actual, occurrent experiences, they're E, 'out there'. Someone might want to list them on the I side, thus,

	I	E
e_1	[RBX1] [RBX]	[r ₁ ,b ₁]
e_2	[RBY1] [RBY]	[r ₁ ,b ₁]

on the ground that they are indeed types of I-content. But anyone who feels even in the slightest bit ‘ontological’ about them should classify them as E-content.

I don’t feel particularly ontological about them myself, but even so they can’t go on the I side, in the present scheme, because they’re not actual occurrent I-content at all. They’re E, ‘out there’, given my definition of I-content as occurrent phenomenological content.

I’ll come back to this. First, though, consider one of my philosophical ‘Twins’, my newly born, hallucinating ‘Instant Twin’, say, as I have experience with I-content [RBX1] – which is of course experience of type [RBX]. My Instant Twin’s experience isn’t of any actual river or bridge, so there’s a blank in the E-content slot where I have r₁ and b₁. And obviously his experience isn’t numerically identical to mine. I have experience e_1 and he has experience e_3 : the I-content of his experience isn’t numerically identical to mine, considered as the concrete occurrent phenomenon it is. I have an experience with I-content [RBX1] and he has an experience with I-content [RBX2]. But his experience is of course phenomenologically identical to mine: his and my experiences are both of type [RBX]. They have exactly the same content in that very clear and straightforward sense; his content may be said numerically identical to mine considered as a *type* of content ([RBX]).

12. Twins

	I	E	
e_1	[RBX1]	[r ₁ ,b ₁] [RBX]	(me)
e_2	[RBY1]	[r ₁ ,b ₁] [RBY]	(my sister)
e_3	[RBX2]	[----] [RBX]	(my Instant Twin)

What about my Twin on Perfect Twin Earth (PTE)? How does my PTE Twin’s experience, e_4 , classify contentwise relative to e_1 – e_3 , given that my Perfect Twin is looking at or thinking about a real river and a real bridge qualitatively identical to the River Cherwell and the Humpback Bridge here on earth, a river and a bridge which we may call [r₂] and [b₂] respectively? The answer is plain:

	I	E	
e_1	[RBX1]	[r ₁ ,b ₁] [RBX]	(me)
e_2	[RBY1]	[r ₁ ,b ₁] [RBY]	(my sister)
e_3	[RBX2]	[----] [RBX]	(my Instant Twin)
e_4	[RBX3]	[r ₂ ,b ₂] [RBX]	(my PTE Twin)

And now we may as well bring in my Classical Twin Earth Twin, and add a slot to the diagram to represent the fact that my sister and I and my PTE Twin are having experience of iron (Fe) and water (H₂O). Call my Classical Twin Earth Twin’s river-bridge experience e_5 , and suppose that just as the stuff they call ‘water’ on Classical Twin Earth is xyz , so the stuff they call ‘iron’ on Classical Twin Earth is klm . The diagram is then as follows:

e_1	I [RBX1]	E [r_1, b_1] [Fe, H ₂ O] [RBX]	(me)
e_2	[RBY1]	[r_1, b_1] [Fe, H ₂ O] [RBY]	(my sister)
e_3	[RBX2]	[----] [----] [RBX]	(my Instant Twin)
e_4	[RBX3]	[r_2, b_2] [Fe, H ₂ O] [RBX]	(my PTE Twin)
e_5	[RBX4]	[r_3, b_3] [klm, xyz] [RBX]	(my CTE Twin)

All this is routine, given my starting point: the definition of I-content as concretely occurring, clockable phenomenological content.²⁸ Plainly nothing more is going to be added on the I-content side in this diagram, given the way I’ve defined I-content; whatever else is added on the E-content side.

13. Two Questions

So far, perhaps, the I/E borderline is clear enough. On one side, there’s the I-content of the experience, the concretely occurring phenomenological content of the experience. On the other side, there’s everything else that the experience can correctly be said to be of, including numbers, phenomenological-content types, and so on.²⁹

‘*C’est très joli*’, you may say, ‘but you haven’t told me how you’re going to specify cognitive-phenomenological I-content in detail. How are you going to specify the respects in which your cognitive-phenomenological I-content is the same as your Twins’ and different from your sister’s?’

I address this issue in another paper.³⁰ Here I’m going to put it aside, because I’m concerned with something else: difficulties with the distinction – the border – between I-content and E-content. I’m approaching the difficulty in a rather oblique way, and I hope the point of doing so will become clear.

²⁸ All externalists take content to be something that can concretely exist, in so far as they take it that rivers and bridges, trees and people can be the E-content of mental states.

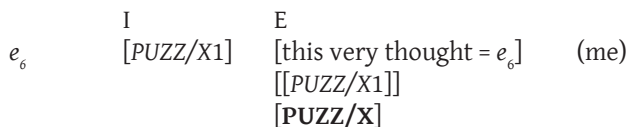
²⁹ I take it that my consciously thinking about the number 2 is a real, concrete, spatiotemporally located occurrence, an experience that is correctly described as involving my being in relation to a certain content which we may call ‘the number 2’, whatever we suppose the number 2 to be.

³⁰ Strawson (2011). I think there are severe limits on what can be said about this matter, but that it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t put the reality of cognitive experience (*sive* cognitive phenomenology) in question in any way.

Back to the I/E border. In my scheme, it lies where I've made it lie by definition. The I-content of an experience is its occurrent phenomenological content. Its E-content is: every other sort of mental content it can correctly be said to have, including everything that has traditionally been called 'internal content': the kind of mental content that I fully share with my Twins. Plainly the I-content of one experience can be the E-content of another, as when I think about my pain, or yours. E-content picks up on 'the world', the surrounding environment, and my experiences (and yours) are part of the world, as are my amygdala and my pineal gland (and yours).

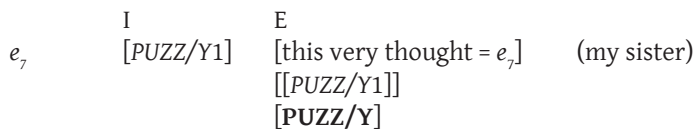
Now suppose I consciously and understandingly think *this very thought is puzzling*. What happens to the I/E distinction? My thought-experience, call it e_6 , has cognitive-experiential content, like any conscious thought. It also has cognitive content, like any thought, and it seems natural to think that a thought-experience's cognitive content is always E-content. But this appears to throw the standard internal/external content distinction into disarray. It also sounds problematic for the I/E distinction. For if a conscious thought can be about itself, then, given that its I-phenomenological content is at least part of what it itself is, it seems that its I-content is at least part of its E-content. (In saying 'at least part of' I'm taking e_6 to be something more than its I-content, but one could cancel this supposition.) This doesn't sound so good.

How is it represented in a diagram of the sort I introduced earlier? If we call the cognitive-experiential content of my thought *this very thought is puzzling* [PUZZ/X1], we may diagram my situation with regard to mental content as follows:



Strikingly, the I-content [PUZZ/X1] features twice. It features both as actually occurring I-content and – qua object of thought – as E-content, cognitive content.³¹ Evidently it has to exist as actually occurring I-content in order to be available to be thought about in such a way as to be E-content.

I've named the (cognitive-phenomenological) I-content of e_6 'PUZZ/X1', rather than just 'PUZZ1', because I want to allow for the possibility that my sister's cognitive-phenomenological content-type is different, even if it's also very similar, when she thinks *this very thought is puzzling*:



Let me add some more detail. When I think *this very thought is puzzling* I know what I'm thinking, and my thinking what I'm thinking involves the conscious deployment of the concepts thought and puzzlingness. These are therefore part of its E-content, as is the proposition this very thought is puzzling.

14. This Very Thought Is Puzzling (I)

³¹ There is redundancy in the list of E-contents, because the component denoted by '[[PUZZ/X1]]' is literally part of the component denoted by '[this very thought = e_6]'

e_6	I [PUZZ/X1]	E [this very thought = e_6] [[PUZZ/X1]] [PUZZ/X] [PUZZLINGNESS] [THOUGHT] [THIS VERY THOUGHT IS PUZZLING]	(part of e_6)
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My Instant Twin – who I take it can have thoughts (*pace* Davidson’s Swampman), and who isn’t debarred from thinking about puzzlingness by his instantaneity any more than he’s debarred from thinking about algebraic topology – diagrams like this:

e_8	I [PUZZ/X2]	E [this very thought = e_8] [[PUZZ/X2]] [PUZZ/X] [PUZZLINGNESS] [THOUGHT] [THIS VERY THOUGHT IS PUZZLING]	(my Instant Twin)
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The same goes for my Perfect Twin Earth (e_9) and my Classical Twin Earth Twin (e_{10}), *mutatis mutandis*.

15. Everything Is F We don’t have to consider immediately self-referential thoughts like *this very thought is puzzling* to make the point. We can consider a thought about the universe, e.g. the concretely occurring thought *everything is what it is (and not another thing)*, which is equally about itself, as well as everything else – since any thought about everything is about itself. Suppose I consciously think that everything is *F*. Let [EVERYTHING FX/1] represent the cognitive-experiential content of my conscious thinking that everything is *F*.³² Then e_{11} diagrams as follows:

e_{11}	I [EVERYTHING F/X1]	E [everything] [this very thought = e_{11}] [[EVERYTHING F/X1]] [EVERYTHING F/X] [F-NESS, EVERYTHINGNESS] [EVERYTHING IS F] ³³	(part of everything) (part of e_{11} & of everything)
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Am I bothered, in the words of the alarming British comedienne Catherine Tate? Am I bothered by this apparent complication? No. Once again, there’s no difficulty in the idea that I-content can be E-content. Everything that exists can be thought about in such a way as to be

32 As before the point of the ‘X’ variable is to permit representation of the possibility that the cognitive-phenomenological content of my sister’s thinking that everything is *F* (‘EVERYTHING F/Y1’ where $X \neq Y$) is different even though it latches on to the same cognitive content.

33 Again there is redundancy in the specification of the E-content of e_{11} because [everything] is already everything, but I think it’s worth naming certain other particular elements.

the E-content of a mental episode (in such a way as to be content according to any externalist conception of content), and I-content as defined (concretely occurring phenomenological content) is obviously one of the things that exist.³⁴ I can think about your experience of pain now, or my experience of pain yesterday, or my experience of pain right now. In each case the I-content of my thought-experience, on the present account, is simply: what it's like for me to have that thought, phenomenologically, and neither your pain now nor my pain yesterday nor my pain now is itself part of what it's like to think that thought. So your pain now, and my pain yesterday and today is part of the E-content of my thought, whatever else it is or isn't.³⁵ There does nevertheless seem to be a problem about how exactly we should put things, given that I-content can be E-content. One possible conclusion to draw is that the internal-external content distinction isn't a very good one, either in my I/E version or in the standard Int/Ext version. External content, we used to say, is a matter of the subject's environment. But we soon see that we have to add the subject itself to its environment, in so far as the subject itself is a concrete item that can feature in its own experience, and indeed in what we naturally classify as the external content of its experience. And now it seems that the subject's subjective experience, another concrete item, has to be added to the subject's environment, in what has now become a rather theoretical sense of 'environment', in so far as it too is something that can possibly feature in its experience, and so be part of what we seem to be required to classify as the external/E content of its experience. This is so whether it's thinking about its present pain, or about its experience, yesterday, of remembering something that happened a year ago. And now it seems that even the occurrent phenomenological content of the subject's present experience needs to be added to the subject's 'environment' in cases where it features as part of the E-content of the experience of which it is the I-content (e.g. in *this-very-thought-is-puzzling* cases).

We can perhaps improve things slightly, along the lines of questions Q5 and Q6 in §1, by moving from the notion of the subject's environment to the notion of the experience's environment, when seeking to characterize externality in terms of surrounding environment. But this won't help when it comes to the fact that the experience itself – including of course its I-content – is part of the E-content of the experience, given that the experience is the thought that everything is F and that it is itself part of everything. But this is not to say that there is really no such thing as I-content. Even if I-content can be E-content, we can still characterize it in a way that distinguishes it from everything else that can be E-content. It may help to say this:

I-content, i.e. concretely occurring phenomenological content, is something that is by its nature *immediately phenomenologically given*, in a way that nothing can possibly be

34 I obviously can't think about things that don't exist – they can't possibly be part of the E-content of any thought or experience I have – but I can of course have a genuine thought with genuine E-content when I purport to think about *the golden mountain* (a well known example of something that doesn't exist). For in this case my thought has wholly respectable E-content: the E-content is a concept, the complex concept UNIQUELY INSTANTIATED GOLDEN MOUNTAIN. So too, the conscious thought-experience or apparent thought-experience that I have, when I purport to think about the golden mountain which I believe to exist, has I-content in having the cognitive-experiential content it has, and so *ipso facto* has further E-content, i.e. the I-content type of which it is a token in having the cognitive-experiential character it has. Even if I can't take a particular individual object outside my light cone as a particular object of thought (but why not? I can individuate something as *the largest thing that exists outside my light cone if indeed there is such any such thing*), I can think about it in so far as I can think generally about the universe and all the things in it.

35 It may be said that a shadowy sense/feeling representation of pain is part of what it's like to think about pain, and it may even be supposed that such a representation is itself in some way a matter of pain. But even if this were so, that pain would not itself be the pain that the thought is about.

given when it's given in the sense that it is the E-content of an experiential episode (a conscious thought, say). I-content is immediately phenomenologically given content *considered just as immediately phenomenologically given!* In this sense it's not just immediately phenomenologically given content. It is, to repeat, immediately phenomenologically given content *as immediately phenomenologically given.*³⁶

It seems that one has to say something like this because, again, one can think consciously about immediately phenomenologically given content. One can not only think about it in general terms (as you and I are doing now in thinking about it philosophically). It seems that one can also think about one's own *currently occurring* immediately phenomenologically given content. Suppose one is in pain: one has currently occurring immediately phenomenologically given pain content – call it *P*. Suppose one is thinking about it as one has it.³⁷ Call this thought *T*. *P* is of course part of the content of one's conscious thought about it, simply because it's what *T* is about. But *P* is part of the E-content of *T* (which has of course its own immediately given cognitive-experiential I-content). And although *P* is indeed, in itself, immediately phenomenologically given content, it is not part of the content of *T* *considered just as immediately phenomenologically given content*.

I've put the point badly so that I can make the following objection. 'Yes it is. It's part of the content of *T* as it is in itself, and it is itself, as you say, currently occurring immediately phenomenologically given content. In becoming the object of *T*, it doesn't change its nature.' True. The fact remains that the occurrence of *T* is not the occurrence of *P*, although the occurrence of *P* is part of the content of *T*. It's in this sense that *P* is not part of the content of *T* *as immediately phenomenologically given content.*³⁸

This sounds rather 'French' (someone old-fashioned might say), but there's nothing obscure about it. If it's French, that just shows that we need the French, and that we sometimes need them to be very 'French'. There is, again, no problem in the fact that I can think about your I-content, or my own, in such a way that it is then correctly said to be the E-content of the thought that I then have. This is because, when I think about it in this way, I'm not in so doing *having* it (I'm not having it in doing precisely and only this, *sc.* thinking about it). I'm not apprehending it – experiencing it or having it – immediately, or 'from the inside', in the way which is on the present terms (definitionally) constitutive of something's being I-content. I submit that the I-content/E-content distinction is clear in spite of the complications introduced by experiences like thinking about everything. The difference between the way in which I-content is I-content and the way in which it can be E-content is no more mysterious than the difference between being in pain and thinking of being in pain. In fact the latter difference is a case of the former. Plainly being in pain and thinking of being in pain are different, because I can think of being in pain when I'm not in pain. I can also, of course, think about being in pain when I am in pain, and I can think about being in the very pain I am then in. In that case the pain features in my overall current experience both as I-content, simply in

36 Some like to say that the Humpback Bridge can be immediately phenomenologically given. I don't need to reject what they have in mind when they say this, or even this way of saying it, because the Humpback Bridge certainly isn't immediately phenomenologically given in the present sense. Only a purely experiential phenomenon can be said to be immediately phenomenologically given in the present sense, and the Humpback Bridge isn't a purely experiential phenomenon.

37 I'll assume here that this is possible. It may be doubted on the ground that human experience is in the final analysis strictly 'one-track', in such a way that one can't simultaneously think about one's pain and also experience it; one can only flick rapidly between the two different experiential contents.

38 One can equally well, as a philosopher, think a thought about *immediately phenomenologically given content as immediately phenomenologically given content*. But the point just made holds good.

being had or felt, and also as E-content, in being thought about. And in that case it is available to be thought about – to be taken as E-content – in what is essentially exactly the same way as the way in which a physical thing like a chair is available to be thought about when it is perceptually present. It can, for example, be thought about demonstratively.³⁹ You can think about it too; you may wonder what it's like. Although it is a 'private' experience of mine, it is one of the things that exists in your environment, a few yards away from you, and you know it's there.

Let me briefly return to e_6 , the conscious thought *this very thought is puzzling*. The I-content of e_6 is also part of the E-content of e_6 , but the I-content of e_6 is not immediately phenomenologically given in so far as it's given in being part of the E-content of e_6 . E-content can include I-content, as observed, but everything's in order, because the following remains true and immutable: *the phenomenon of an experience's having E-content is never the phenomenon of an experience's having I-content* – even when part of its E-content is (as in the present case) its I-content.

So to repeat: when I have a thought-experience that consists in thinking *this very thought is puzzling*, the I-content of the experience (sc its cognitive-phenomenological content, not its cognitive content) features twice in the full specification of its content, once as I-content and once as E-content. It features first as I-content because the thought-experience *consists* concretely in the cognitive experience of thinking *this very thought is puzzling* being immediately phenomenologically given. This phenomenon – the concretely occurring cognitive experience e_6 of thinking *this very thought is puzzling* being immediately phenomenologically given – is then given again as E-content, because the experience is about itself considered as a whole, and is therefore *a fortiori* about one of its features, to wit, its I-content (phenomenological content). e_6 is also, of course, about the brain processes that constitute or are it. It's about the brain processes that constitute or are it even if their being is also in some way additional to the being of e_6 's phenomenological content (which may be doubted); and even if one isn't thinking about e_6 considered specifically as it is characterized in neurophysiological terms. But we needn't consider this sort of point now.⁴⁰

This description of what is going on may seem complicated, even horribly complicated, but I don't think that it's more complicated than the phenomenon it aims to describe. Things are rich. Thought is rich, experience is rich.

I've argued that there's a key sense in which you can't stop E-content going all the way in. It can go everywhere. It can reach everything that exists, whatever your preferred ontology. Everything that exists can be E-content. But there's also something it can't do. Even when it's gone all the way in, it can't get at the all-the-way-in phenomenon 'from the inside' – as it were. I-content is (again) occurrent phenomenological content *experienced from the inside*, occurrent phenomenological content *as immediately experienced*; all other mental content is E-content. I've put it badly again. It seems at first that we can express the relevant point simply by saying that although I-content can be E-content, I-content as immediately experienced can't be E-content. But although the idea may seem clear enough, expressed in this way, it's possible to take the phrase 'as immediately experienced' in a way in which it's not intended, and say that it is indeed and *precisely* occurrent phenomenological content as immediately experienced

16. *This Very Thought Is Puzzling* (II)

17. Summary

39 I could replace 'a physical thing like a chair is available to be thought about when it is perceptually present' with 'other physical things, like chairs, are available to be thought about when perceptually present', for according to physicalism all experiential goings-on are physical things.

40 In entertaining the E-content *this very thought is puzzling* one is in fact thinking about the neurophysiology considered specifically as such, even though one isn't thinking about it in the terms of neurophysiology.

that can be E-content. Suppose I'm thinking about your conscious thinking. I'm taking your occurrent phenomenological content as the object of my thought, and there's a clear sense in which I'm taking your occurrent phenomenological content just as it is, hence as it is immediately experienced (by you), as the object of my thought. The object of my thought is the occurrent phenomenological content of your thought as immediately experienced by you. I've suggested that we can deal with this by saying that the I-content of a given experience – say e_{12} – is the phenomenological content of *that very experience* e_{12} as immediately given in *that very experience*. This allows that the I-content of e_{12} can be part of the E-content of some other experience, say e_{13} , and so allows – trivially – that the I-content of e_{12} as immediately experienced can be part of the E-content of some other experience e_{13} . What the I-content of e_{12} can't be, of course, is part of the I-content of some other experience. We face again the case of e_6 , the experience of consciously thinking that *this very thought is puzzling*, where part of the E-content of the experience is its own I-content. There's nothing problematic about this, however. For

(i) the phenomenon of [PUZZ/X1]'s being the I-content of e_6

consists in

(ii) [PUZZ/X1]'s being the phenomenological content immediately given in e_6 ,

and

(iii) the phenomenon of [PUZZ/X1]'s being part of the E-content of e_6

does not consist in (ii). This is so even though it is [PUZZ/X1] considered as a whole that is part of the E-content of e_6 and although the existence of [PUZZ/X1] considered as a whole consists wholly in its being the phenomenological content immediately given in e_6 . Reality is complicated.

18. Awareness of Awareness

A further – final – question arises. It seems that it's not just highly recondite, cognitively complex experiences, like consciously thinking *this very thought is puzzling*, that are experiences of themselves. There appears to be a fundamental sense in which every experience, even the most primitive sensory experience, is of itself – whatever else it may or may not be of. There appears to be a fundamental sense in which *all awareness comports awareness of that very awareness*, i.e. *awareness of itself*, AOI for short – where by 'comports' I mean 'carries along in itself', 'contains within itself'.

This time-honoured view is sometimes expressed by talking of the 'self-intimating' or 'phosphorescent' character or 'self-luminosity' of experience.⁴¹ I'll call it the 'self-intimation thesis' – 'Self-Intimation' for short. Arnauld puts it by saying that "thought or perception is essentially reflective on itself, or, as it is said more aptly in Latin, *est sui conscia*" i.e. is conscious of itself.⁴² Grove uses 'thought' in the same general way when he writes that 'thought is an operation that involves in it a consciousness of itself' (1718, p. 187). It's endorsed by many other philosophers including Descartes, La Forge, Locke, Reid, almost all Phenomenologists (including Sartre, Husserl and Heidegger), Aristotle, and many Indian

41 Ryle uses these terms (with disparaging intent) in *The Concept of Mind* (see e.g. pp. 158-159).

42 Arnauld (1683, p. 71); he uses 'thought or perception' to cover all conscious mental goings on.

philosophers.⁴³ In the version I (and I think most of its proponents) favour, self-intimation or AOI is held to be necessary for an experience's having any experiential character at all, i.e. any I-content (as currently defined) at all.⁴⁴ All agree that this immediate awareness of awareness is an essentially 'same-order' matter: it's nothing to do with any sort of explicit reflective (introspective) inspection of one's experiences, inspection that essentially involves a (higher-order) mental state taking another (lower-order) mental state as its object.

Is Self-Intimation true? I think it is, but this is a question for another time (see e.g. Dreyfus 2011, Strawson 2015). My present aim is simply to argue that it's compatible with the present account of the distinction between I and E mental content. This may be doubted, for, on the terms of the present account, Self-Intimation amounts to the claim that all I-content, all concretely occurring phenomenological content, necessarily comports experience *of itself*, and so presumably has itself as content. And if *of-ness* of content entails externality – *E-ity* – of content, then if Self-Intimation is true it appears that I-content exists essentially partly because it is part of its own E-content!

This not only sounds extremely puzzling; it also directly challenges the present distinction between I- and E-content. For the distinction depends on the idea that E-content doesn't and can't go 'all the way in'; and E-content now seems to be threatening to do precisely this.

The difficulty – seeming difficulty – arises from the supposition that *of-ness* entails *E-ity*, and it is this that I would question. Some who endorse Self-Intimation allow that *of-ness* entails *E-ity*, but deny that AOI or self-intimation is really a matter of *of-ness*. Sartre expresses this idea by putting parentheses round the word 'of'. He holds that the 'of' is grammatically required but metaphysically quite misleading. On this view, the claim that *of-ness* entails *E-ity* is correct, but the immediate *sui generis* reflexivity of experience isn't really a matter of *of-ness* at all.

More generally, proponents of this view argue that the self-intimation of experience is not only 'pre-reflective', 'immediate', 'immanent', 'implicit', 'non-positional', 'non-objectifying', but also 'irrelational': fundamentally metaphysically irrelational.⁴⁵

I think that this is one possible way to put things. I think it's hard to avoid if one accepts that all experience involves AOI and allows that *of-ness* entails *E-ity*. But I see no reason to take 'of' in this way. I think it's correct to say that all experience – all I-content – comports awareness of itself, in the full sense of 'of', and equally that it is (therefore) genuinely *relational* with respect to itself, and (therefore) genuinely *intentional* with respect to itself, and has itself as its own *content*. I don't think this creates any pressure on us to say that it is part of its own E-content.

Let 'c' stand as before for the I-content of an experience, as in §3. I distinguished earlier between

(a) c considered as immediately phenomenologically given 'from the inside' in the having of the experience

and

(b) c considered as something that can be part of the E-content of experiences, along with bridges and rivers.⁴⁶

43 Hume also very probably held this view; see e.g. Strawson (2013, p. 151fn.). Some deny that Descartes and Locke hold it.

44 I'm inclined to say that this necessity is a constitutive matter, but there appear to be certain difficulties in this idea, and some think that AOI is essential to the existence of experience without actually being constitutive of it.

45 See e.g. Zahavi (1999, p. 33).

46 Either other experiences, or – in the case of conscious thoughts like *this very thought is puzzling* or *everything is F* – itself.

To consider c in way (a) is simply to consider it as it is in and of itself – to consider it in its essential being. To consider it in way (b) is to consider it as something that is, in the current sense of ‘immediately given’, *not* immediately given in the experience of whose E-content it is part, although what it is in and of itself – metaphysically or ontologically – is, as just remarked, something that is immediately phenomenologically given ‘from the inside’ in the having of experience.

I hope this is clear enough: the (a) phenomenon can’t exist at all, in such a way that the (b)-phenomenon can possibly exist – where the (b)-phenomenon is the phenomenon of I-content being E-content – unless AOI or self-intimation is already in place, since AOI or self-intimation is a necessary condition of the existence of any phenomenological character or content at all. And although it’s perfectly acceptable to say that the I-content of the experience has itself as content – I think this is a powerful way of expressing the *sui generis* self-intimating nature of consciousness – the constitutive immediacy of this relation gives us no reason to say that it involves I-content being (part of) its own E-content. Consider e_{14} , a two-second Red23-experience that occurs spontaneously in the brain with no external cause. (One can think of it as a hallucination, although it needn’t be thought to be anything other than a subjective red-experience that is not an experience of something in the external environment.) As I understand it, e_{14} diagrams as follows:



It has no concrete E-content in being a kind of hallucination, and it is of course experience of *type* Red23, so [Red23] duly appears as part of its E-content.

What about the fact that it’s looped on itself in the AOI way that is (i) necessary to the very existence of experience, and (ii) makes it correct to say that it is experience of itself? The present claim is simply that AOI doesn’t require us to place [Red23] in the E-content list of e_{14} (even though there are cases – e.g. e_6 and e_8 – in which an experience’s I-content does appear in its E-content list). Perhaps the simplest way to represent AOI in a diagram of this sort is to draw a looping arrow from [Red23] to [Red23] on the I-content side.

On this view, then, we allow that use of the word ‘of’ is appropriate in the way that it clearly seems to be, when we try to characterize the AOI that is a necessary part of any phenomenology at all; but we deny that this of-ness entails E-ity.

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47 In the case of e_{15} , an experience qualitatively identical to e_{14} caused in the normal way by light reflected off the surface of an object, one can fill the blank slot in accordance with one’s preferred theory of how colour is to be understood when it is conceived of as something that exists independently of colour-experience. It won’t matter that different people have qualitatively different colour experiences when they have visual experience of this surface in this light (I discuss some difficulties with this idea in Strawson, 1989).

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