PEACOCKE’S SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Annalisa Coliva

Abstract

The paper reviews Christopher Peacocke’s account of self-knowledge. His proposal relies on the claim that first-order mental states may be given to a subject so as to function as reasons, from his point of view, for the corresponding self-ascriptions. Peacocke’s Being Known elicits two different views of how that may be the case: a given propositional attitude is considered to be conscious if, on the one hand, there is something it is like to have it; and, on the other, if it can occupy a subject’s attention without being an object of attention. I examine both views and conclude that, on the latter, Peacocke’s proposal risks of not offering an independent reason for the self-ascription, and, on the former, of offering no reason at all. I then turn to some ideas from his The Realm of Reason and claim that they can help stabilise his earlier account only at the cost of surrendering internalism in the epistemology of psychological self-ascriptions and of contaminating internalist proposals about knowledge of any subject matter with an externalist base which would betray their point. Unless one doesn’t want to pay this price, then Peacocke’s account offers no solution to the problem of self-knowledge.1

An important group of the philosophical problems of self-knowledge originate in the immediate and authoritative way in which each of us characteristically knows of his own intentional mental states. After a rather prolonged focus on the problem of the compatibility of such self-knowledge with semantic externalism, attention has recently been reverting to the older, more general issue of providing a suitable account of self-knowledge per se. Here much of the discussion has been conditioned by the now familiar ‘either by observation, or by inference, or by nothing’ 2

1 I would like to thank Akeel Bilgrami, Carol Rovane, Crispin Wright, Jane Heal, Lucy O’Brien, Elisabeth Pacherie, Jim Pryor, Jerome Dokic, Paolo Faria, Barry Smith, Joelle Proust, Achille Varzi and three anonymous referees for advice on specific points and helpful comments on previous versions of this paper.

trichotomy which has begun to be perceived by many as a real
triplemma, whose horns are each seriously problematical. In par-
ticular, the ‘by nothing’ horn, first presented by Crispin Wright
and Paul Boghossian in the late ’80s as – ironically – the only
viable escape from the earlier ‘either by observation, or by infer-
ence’ dilemma,\(^3\) has recently come under pressure in its turn.

According to the ‘by nothing’ type of view, the characteristic
authority granted to a subject’s impressions of his own intentional
states is an a priori and constitutive feature of the linguistic prac-
tice of ascribing mental states with propositional content.\(^4\)

However, theorists working in this area now seem to be becoming
increasingly sceptical of the idea that self-knowledge should best
be seen as the result of no cognitive achievement whatever.\(^5\) It is
indeed natural to think, contrary to constitutivism, that first and
second order mental states are distinct existences; moreover, that
it is one thing to have first-order mental states and quite another
to know what they are and that the latter knowledge may only
plausibly be conceived as brought about by being appropriately –
that is, cognitively – related to the former.

\(^3\) See Crispin Wright, ‘Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy of Mind: Sensation, Privacy and
Boghossian, ‘Content and Self-knowledge’, Philosophical Topics, XVII (1989), pp. 5–26
(pp. 5, 17 in particular). The traditional forms of observationalism and inferentialism can
be traced back to Descartes and Ryle respectively. Recent supporters of the observational
model and of the inferential one, however, are David Armstrong, A Materialist Theory of the
Mind (London: Routledge, 1968) – author of a reliabilist version of the former – and Alison
Gopnik, ‘How We Know Our Minds: the Illusion of First-person Knowledge of Intention-
ality’, Brain and Behavioural Science, XVI (1983), pp. 1–14 – author of a refined version of
the latter. For a criticism of these models and their developments see, for example, Sydney
Shoemaker, The First Person Perspective and Other Essays (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
1986) especially at pp. 201–23; Crispin Wright, ‘Self-knowledge: the Wittgensteinian
Legacy’, in Crispin Wright, Cynthia Macdonald and Barry Smith (eds.), Knowing Our Own
Expression and Self-Knowledge (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chs. 2, 4;
and Akeel Bilgrami, Self-Knowledge and Resentment (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2006),
Ch. 1.

\(^4\) Among those broadly in agreement with Wright and Boghossian, beside the already
mentioned Shoemaker and Bilgrami, see also Jane Heal, ‘On First-person Authority’,

\(^5\) See Peacocke, Being Known, Chs. 5 (and 6); Richard Moran, Authority and Estrangement
Lucy O’Brien, ‘Self-knowledge, Agency and Force’, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,
forthcoming.
In this aporetic context Christopher Peacocke’s recently proposed Rationalist account of intentional self-knowledge is apt to impress as especially welcome. Peacocke’s model is meant to vindicate the intuitive picture according to which self-knowledge is indeed real knowledge, while avoiding both the observational and the inferential stories about how such knowledge is grounded. It is the brief of this note to argue that Peacocke’s proposal unfortunately also confronts serious objections of its own, which might perhaps be overcome, but at significant costs, and that it isn’t obvious that he or anyone else may want to pay them.

Peacocke’s Rationalist account of self-knowledge

According to Peacocke, ‘conscious thoughts and current attitudes (. . .) can give (. . .) the thinker a reason for self-ascribing an attitude to the content which occurs to the thinker, provided our thinker is conceptually equipped to make the self-ascription’. To illustrate: suppose you have (1) an apparent memory that Italy was a monarchy before World War Two. That, according to Peacocke, gives you a (non-conclusive) reason for (2) judging that Italy was a monarchy before World War Two, which, in turn, gives you a reason for (3) self-ascribing the belief that Italy was a monarchy before World War Two (provided you possess the first person concept, the concept of belief and those concepts which are necessary for the specification of the content of your belief). In Peacocke’s view, when the self-ascription is formed in this way, it amounts to knowledge, because the second-order belief would be true – in virtue of the conceptual truth that if one judges that \( p \), one believes it – and justified by the corresponding first-order mental state. In Peacocke’s view, this proposal avoids inferentialism because ‘to say that (2) is the thinker’s reason for making the judgement

---


7 Peacocke, Being Known, p. 214.

8 According to Peacocke, a judgement that \( p \) may not always occur, as a matter of fact, but it should always be available to a subject, in order for his psychological self-ascription to be justified (Peacocke, Being Known, pp. 222–3; 241–2).
in (3) is not to say that he infers the self-ascription from a premise that he has made such a first-order judgement’. It avoids observationalism – both in classic Cartesian and more modern reliabilist versions – because to say that a first-order mental state is conscious doesn’t mean, according to Peacocke, that it is an object of (quasi-perceptual) attention, but, rather, that it occupies a subject’s attention: being in a certain intentional state contributes to a subject’s phenomenology – to what things are like from his subjective point of view – despite the fact that the state isn’t presented to him as an object. Furthermore, contrary to Armstrong’s reliabilist account, on Peacocke’s view, a first-order conscious mental state is taken to be a subject’s own *reason* for making the corresponding self-ascription and not merely its cause. Finally, Peacocke’s model is not a version of constitutivism because he denies both the constitutivist’s ontological claim that first-order mental states depend for their existence on the corresponding self-ascriptions, and the constitutivist’s anti-cognitive claim that subjects’ psychological self-ascriptions are not justified by their first-order mental states. In particular, for Peacocke, while it is a conceptual truth that if one judges that *p*, one believes it and that it is part of the possession-conditions of the concept of belief that one be disposed to judge that one believes that *p* if one judges that *p*, this does not at all preclude the possibility that first-order conscious mental states have existence independent of their self-ascription nor, especially, that they can function as a subject’s own reasons for the corresponding self-ascriptions.

It is important to emphasise here that Peacocke’s proposal is offered as a form of epistemologically *internalist* model: reasons are conscious states of a thinker, which, moreover, are open to first-personal scrutiny. After all, at least in some cases, a subject might realise that he has mistaken either the nature or the content of his first-order mental states, as cases of wishful thinking and of self-deception seem to show, and has thereby been prompted to make an erroneous self-ascription. What is precluded by Peacocke’s model, however, is arrival at the self-ascription on the basis of *self-conscious consideration* of one’s own

---

first-order conscious mental states. For that would place the very self-knowledge to be accounted for at the foundation of a purported account of how such knowledge is grounded. What Peacocke requires is that first-order mental states can, without being explicitly judged and thereby made the content of a second-order state, somehow be salient to consciousness and taken at face value in the formation of the relevant self-ascriptions, and subsequently can be offered as reasons for them and, on occasion, scrutinised and assessed.

The first two horns of the critique

Peacocke’s proposal thus relies crucially on the claim that first-order mental states may be given to a subject in such a way as to function as reasons, from his own point of view, for the corresponding self-ascriptions. Hence, in order for the proposal to be implemented satisfactorily, he needs a notion of a conscious mental state that can support the claim that the corresponding self- ascription would be rationally justified merely by its occurrence. Concerning what it is for a mental state to be conscious, however, he offers two, not obviously equivalent, proposals. One is that a mental state is conscious if there is something it is like to have it. This suggestion amounts to the idea that a mental state is conscious if there is something subjectively distinctive about being in it. The other proposal is that a mental state is conscious if it occupies our attention without being an object of attention. This suggestion, in contrast, amounts to the idea that a mental state is conscious if it is such that it can occupy our attention in the following sense: it is something whose nature, content, presuppositions and theoretical and practical consequences we can attend to, without turning the state itself into an object of attention.

14 Peacocke, Being Known, pp. 205–6.
15 Peacocke, Being Known, p. 207.
16 For instance, at pp. 209–10 of his Being Known Peacocke writes:

I now attempt some further analysis of the occupation of the attention by conscious thought. When you have a thought, it does not normally come neat, unconnected with other thoughts and contents. Rather, in having a particular thought, you often appreciate certain of its relations to other thoughts and contents. You have a thought, and you may be aware that its content is a consequence, perhaps gratifying, perhaps alarming, of another conclusion you have just reached; or you may be aware that its content is evidence for some hypothesis that you have formulated; or that it is a counterexample to the hypothesis.
The second suggestion seems highly problematical. For, presumably, one can attend to the nature, content, presuppositions and consequences of one’s mental states only if one is aware of what kind of mental states they are – judgements, desires, wishes, etc. –, of what content they have, and of how they can be related, as such, to one’s other mental states, with their own respective contents. After all, one can attend to the presuppositions and consequences of, for example, one’s judgement that Italy was a monarchy before World War Two, only if one is aware of the fact that it is indeed a judgement and not just a supposition, or a wish, or a suspicion that that was the case. Moreover, Peacocke maintains that if a mental state is occupying one’s attention one will probably react to it – feeling gratified, or alarmed, etc. But one can feel alarmed or gratified by a certain thought occurring to him only if one is aware of the kind of thought it is. In fact, in the normal run of cases, I can feel gratified by the belief, or even the certainty, that I will soon have a promotion, but not by the corresponding desire, or fear. (Of course we may complicate the phenomenology and suppose, for instance, that I might feel gratified also by desiring such a coming event, if that showed, say, that I am recovering from a state of dangerous apathy with respect to my work and my career. Still, this would show that for one affectively to react to one’s mental states, one should (at least on occasion) be aware also of their relations. Yet, this would in turn be possible only if one were aware of one’s mental states’ kind as well

(italics mine). Now when you think a particular thought, there is of course no intention in advance to think that particular thought. But there can be an intention to think a thought which stands in a certain relation to other thoughts or contents (italics mine).

This clearly suggests the idea that if a thought occupies one’s attention, then, according to Peacocke, its content must be known to the subject who has it, as well as its practical consequences – like causing one’s feeling alarmed or gratified –, and theoretical ones – such as its relation to other thoughts. As we shall presently see, however, this requires – for Peacocke too – knowledge of the nature of one’s own mental states as well, viz. of their being beliefs as opposed to wishes, imaginings, etc.

17 As a matter of fact, Peacocke talks in terms of ‘rational sensitivity’ to one’s mental states. One way of understanding this (rather vague) expression is in terms of ‘awareness’. But for a different – still problematical – interpretation, see the following paragraph.

18 Peacocke himself makes the point at p. 216 of Being Known: ‘Now the thinker who successfully reaches new beliefs by inference has to be sensitive not only to the content of his initial beliefs. He has also to be sensitive to the fact that his initial states are beliefs. He will not be forming beliefs by inference from the contents of his desires, hopes, or daydreams’.

19 See fn 15.
as of their content). So, the evident problem with Peacocke’s suggestion is that the awareness of the kind and content of one’s own first-order mental state required if it is to occupy one’s attention and inform further attention to its presuppositions and consequences seems – on a quite natural reading of Peacocke’s own account of it – to amount to nothing less than knowledge of that very mental state of which, on his view, it is supposed to provide a rational basis! At the least the gap between them seems to be vanishingly small. But unless it can be widened, Peacocke’s account of self-knowledge would bluntly presuppose exactly what it should explain – and indeed, not because some other piece of self-knowledge would be presupposed but, rather, because the very instance of self-knowledge to be accounted for would be.

One may then try to propose different glosses on the notion of a mental state’s occupying one’s attention. According to a first, alternative reading of it, a given mental state could occupy one’s attention if one were attentively engaging in it, without thereby considering it as the particular mental state it is – say a judgement – with the particular content it has – that Italy was a monarchy before World War II, for example –, pretty much as one could be performing attentively a certain activity – like running – without considering it qua the particular activity it is. This gloss on the notion of the occupation of the attention wouldn’t presuppose explicit awareness of the very mental state whose knowledge is supposed to be accounted for. Nonetheless, it seems to me that it couldn’t be of avail to Peacocke because his model requires that one’s first-order conscious mental states be a subject’s own reasons for his corresponding self-ascriptions. But for psychological self-ascriptions to be rational responses to one’s own occurrent conscious mental states one must actually be aware of them qua the particular mental states they are, with the contents they have. To see this, consider the analogy with running: as much as one could run attentively, without considering it qua the activity it is, if one

20 I am grateful to an anonymous referee for bringing this point to my attention.

21 Peacocke could reply that what is required is knowledge of one’s judgement, whereas what gets self-attributed is a belief. But, first, a judgement is nothing but a mental state (or action). Hence, knowledge of it would be a case of self-knowledge which we are supposed to account for. Secondly, if we applied Peacocke’s model to explain how this latter piece of knowledge could be possible in turn, we would get, on the present proposal, that this very mental state should already be known to a subject who self-ascribed it.

22 I am grateful to an anonymous referee for making me think about such an alternative interpretation of Peacocke’s present proposal.
were to make a rational judgement about what one is attentively
doing, one’s action should be manifest to him as the particular
action it is. Merely engaging in it, as attentively as it might be,
wouldn’t constitute a reason for the corresponding judgement.
Similarly, in the case of mental states, their rational self-ascription
seems to require switching – however momentarily that might be
– from being attentively, yet non-reflectively, engaging in them, to
considering them *qua* the mental states they are, with the contents
they have.

Another possible way of trying to rescue Peacocke’s present
proposal would consist in maintaining that the kind of knowledge
of one’s first-order mental state that the occupation of the atten-
tion requires is merely *tacit* or *implicit*. One might then suggest
that a subject may have the ability to have certain thoughts, act on
them and reason on their basis, thus implicitly knowing what kind
of mental states they are, without yet having the necessary con-
ceptual repertoire to self-ascribe them. This, however, is what
implicit self-knowledge amounts to. And here a problem arises: how
is this implicit knowledge achieved? An answer to this question is
fundamental if implicit self-knowledge has to be the backbone of
an explanation of self-knowledge in general. For, otherwise,
Peacocke’s account would only explain, at most, how one can
come to self-ascribe mental states that are already implicitly
known. Furthermore, even supposing that an account of implicit
self-knowledge were forthcoming, how would the conceptualisa-
tion of implicitly known first-order mental states proceed? If it
depended on a grasp of the conceptual role of first-personal
propositional attitudes – in the case of belief, for instance, on
grasp of the rule ‘If I *judge* that *p*, then I should be disposed to
self-ascribe the corresponding belief’ –, wouldn’t that after all
require explicit knowledge of one’s first-order mental states?

Finally, one could try to revise Peacocke’s own account and
propose less demanding readings of the notion of a mental state’s
occupying one’s own attention. For instance, following Bonjour, one
might claim that there is something like a ‘constitutive aware-
ness’ of the kind and content of one’s intentional mental state
which does not coincide with one’s judging that one has that

23 I would like to thank Barry Smith for bringing this point to my attention.
mental state with such and such a content. But I must confess that, as appealing as it might be, this view seems to me irremediably unclear: if the awareness of the kind and content of one’s mental state is implicit, then the problems just reviewed will re-emerge. If, in contrast, it isn’t, I don’t see how it can avoid collapsing into full-blooded knowledge of one’s first-order mental state. For it may be true that when one is consciously enjoying a first-order intentional state one doesn’t actually have to judge that one has that mental state with that content. However, if that knowledge has to be somehow explicit, it seems that it should be constitutive of having a conscious first-order mental state that one should at least have the disposition to make that kind of judgement. But, in this latter case, Bonjour’s proposal would just be a mere notational variant of more traditional constitutive accounts of self-knowledge a fact that would betray its whole point. Finally, if such constitutive awareness is neither implicit knowledge, nor constituted by the disposition to judge that one has a given first-order mental state, and merely consists in the fact that the kind and content of that state are part of its phenomenology, then the proposal will turn into a version of Peacocke’s first, phenomenological account of what it means for an intentional mental state to be conscious and will be open to the criticisms we shall presently level against it.

So, now, let us turn to Peacocke’s other, phenomenal gloss on what it means for a mental state to be conscious. Here too problems arise. The first one is that the work the proposal assigns to the phenomenology of first-order intentional states now restricts it to the case of self-ascriptions of occurrent mental states, and rules it out for standing attitudes that lack any phenomenological impact. Secondly, even in occurrent cases, the capacity of the phenomenology of first-order mental states to carry the resulting


[Awareness of the kind and content of one’s own occurrent mental state is] not in any way apperceptive or reflective in character: [it does] not require or involve a distinct second-order mental act with the propositional content that I have the belief in question. Instead, [it is] partly constitutive of the first-level state of occurrent belief (…).

26 According to Bonjour, ‘A Version of Internalist Foundationalism’, pp. 65–8 that would either involve us in a vicious regress, or else never provide an account of how a given mental state (first-order or otherwise) could ever be conscious.

27 Such as Bilgrami’s, Self-Knowledge and Resentment, for instance. On his view, it is a necessary condition for having (a certain class of) first-order propositional attitudes that one knows them.
epistemological load falls into question as soon as one reflects that, for example, occurrent desires, hopes or wishes with the same content need hardly be different from a strictly phenomenological point of view, yet will be required somehow to rationalise different self-ascriptions. Thirdly, it is widely agreed, and indeed by Peacocke himself, as it seems, that, even in cases where occurrent intentional states do have a distinctive phenomenology, it remains that rational and justificatory relations hold only between states with representational content in the first place. The idea is that the kind of phenomenology that, for instance, the judgement that today is a sunny day can have – such as the pleasant and relaxing feeling this thought may produce, together with, perhaps, a strong sense of confidence – will not, by themselves, give one a reason to self-ascribe the corresponding belief. Rather, it is only if the first-order mental state presents itself to one as the type of mental state it is – that is, a belief as opposed to a wish or a desire – with the content it has – that today is a sunny day, as


29 At p. 216 of his Being Known Peacocke writes:

In cases of consciously based self-ascription of attitudes and experiences, a thinker [...] makes a transition not only from the content of some initial state, but also makes it because the initial state is of a certain kind (. . .). In the case of consciously based self-ascription, the distinction between those events which are occurrent attitudes of the right kind to sustain the resulting judgement and those which are not is a distinction which is conceptualised by the thinker.

All this clearly implies that the relevant transitions are made on the basis of how the first-order mental states are represented to the subject and not just on the basis of their phenomenology and this seems to ensure their rationality from the subject’s own point of view. So, although, as Jim Pryor has brought to my attention, Peacocke (in his ‘Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?’, Journal of Philosophy, XCVIII (2001), pp. 239–64, pp. 254–5 in particular) maintains that sensations – devoid of any representational content – can immediately justify one’s corresponding self-ascriptions, he does not seem to be inclined to offer an analogous account of intentional mental states and of their self-ascriptions.

Furthermore, for reasons of internal coherence with his earlier work, I think Peacocke should acknowledge that only representational contents – let them be psychological or otherwise – can serve as rationalisers of judgements and, in particular, of self-ascriptions of intentional mental states. Indeed it is only on such an assumption that one can understand why, instead of defending the so-called ‘Myth of the Given’ against McDowell’s attacks, he elaborated a notion of nonconceptual, yet fully representational content for experiences (see Christopher Peacocke, A Study of Concepts (Boston (Mass.): MIT Press, 1992), Ch. 3).
opposed to anything else —, that it can constitute a thinker’s own reason for the corresponding self-ascription. For, otherwise, why should one be more justified in making that self-ascription than in self-ascribing the corresponding hope, say? To see this, consider cases of wishful thinking: certain contents may manifest themselves to a subject with such an intensity and ‘colouring’, as it were, that, while being merely hopes, can actually be taken for beliefs. So, their phenomenology would be pretty much the same, yet only the self-ascription of the relevant hope would be rational on their basis (not just correct). If so, however, it is unclear how any purely phenomenological account of what it means for a mental state to be conscious can support the claim that a first-order state can stand in a rational, justificatory relation to the corresponding self-ascription.\(^{30}\) To repeat, if the phenomenology can be pretty much the same and no other element is required to account for the rationality of a given self-ascription, why should we think that only the self-ascription of the relevant hope, and not of the corresponding belief, would be rational?

To recap: on the attention-occupancy account of what it means for a mental state to be conscious, Peacocke’s proposal that a first-order mental state may provide a reason for the corresponding self-ascription does not discernibly escape presupposing the very piece of (implicit or explicit) self-knowledge we should be accounting for. On the purely phenomenological account, in contrast, there is a real danger of not being provided with anything that could serve as a reason for the corresponding self-ascription. So Peacocke’s account runs the risk either of failing to offer an independent reason for the self-ascription (or of presupposing implicit knowledge of the very item of self-knowledge to be accounted for), or of offering no reason at all.

\(^{30}\) Indeed I think that it is totally unclear how proponents of such a view could solve the problem just mentioned and known as the ‘arbitrariness problem’ (see Pryor, ‘There Is Immediate Justification’, pp. 192–193). For instance, Pryor’s own attempt to solve it by appealing to a notion of mental events which are themselves logically structured is dubious both from a metaphysical point of view, as Achille Varzi has remarked to me, and from an epistemological one. For an internalist needs a justifier that is given to the subject and which can play a rationalising role for his self-ascription from his own point of view. The fact that an event might be, unbeknownst to him, logically structured and suited, in principle, to rationalise the transition from its occurrence to its self-ascription, is of no use to the development of a sound internalist epistemology of psychological self-ascriptions.
The third horn

In his most recent work, 31 Peacocke presents some ideas which may seem suited to evade the dilemma just reviewed. Key amongst them is the claim that there can be unmediated, non-inferential transitions, viz. movements of thought – in our case they would be from conscious first-order mental states to second-order ones that are nevertheless rational, because they are truth-conducive and a priori. By this Peacocke means that there can be movements of thought which are truth-conducive not because – or just because – they are underwritten by reliable physical mechanisms, but because they conform to certain a priori principles. An example would be the principle that if one judges that \( p \), one will believe that \( p \). So the truth of ‘I believe that \( p \)’ will be guaranteed by such a principle. According to Peacocke, the thoughts in which such transitions culminate can be non-inferentially justified merely by the very occurrence of the relevant anterior states from which the transition proceeds. 32 Applying the idea to our present concerns: when one’s psychological self-ascription – ‘I believe that \( p \)’ – is formed by moving from one’s first-order mental state – a judgement that \( p \) – to it directly – that is, without the mediation of any other mental state –, one will have a non-inferential justification – an entitlement in Peacocke’s terminology – for the self-ascription 34.

31 Christopher Peacocke, *The Realm of Reason.*

32 But I need to emphasise that Peacocke in *The Realm of Reason* does not explicitly consider the case of self-knowledge. Rather, I am freely extending views he develops with respect to the relation between perceptual experiences and empirical beliefs to the case of transitions from first-order mental states to second-order ones. He might refuse the extension. However, in a more recent paper (‘Another I’: Representing Conscious States, Perception and Others’, in José Luis Bermúdez (ed.), *Thought, Reference and Experience. Themes from the Philosophy of Gareth Evans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 220–57), Peacocke extends some of these ideas to the case of self-ascriptions of perceptions, i.e. to the transitions from episodes of seeing that \( p \) to the judgement ‘I see that \( p \)’. However instructive that extension might be, our concern here is with self-ascriptions of propositional attitudes only – which is what is usually understood in the literature by ‘self-knowledge’. A discussion of Peacocke’s treatment of self-ascriptions of perceptions will have to be deferred to another occasion, although one point which will be raised in the following – to anticipate, that his new proposal should best be seen as a form of ‘Rational Externalism’, contrary to Peacocke’s professed internalism – seems to me to apply also to his treatment of self-ascriptions of perceptions.

33 Strictly speaking, as Peacocke himself notices (*The Realm of Reason*, p. 26) the results of these transitions would be only ‘relatively a priori’ since they would be justified by the occurrence of particular mental states. Still, they wouldn’t be inferred from them.

34 See Peacocke, *The Realm of Reason*, p. 11.
This proposal promises relief from the consciousness dilemma by enabling us to deflect its second horn: it would allow first-order mental states to count as justifiers after all, even if their nature and content were no part of their phenomenology, just so long as there are suitable a priori principles, which a subject need not be aware of, which could rationalise the transitions he makes to the corresponding second-order states. So, although someone’s judgement that \( p \) need not present itself as such to the subject who makes it, it could still rationalise a self-ascription of the corresponding belief, since the two states may be connected by the a priori principle that if one judges that \( p \), one will believe that \( p \).

It is well beyond the scope of this note to try to evaluate the general standing, let alone the detail, of the notion of entitlement Peacocke explores in the relevant parts of *The Realm of Reason*. My remaining point concerns purely what it may have to offer, in the best case, to bolster his earlier Rationalist account of self-knowledge against the problems I have been describing. For this purpose, it is crucial to recall the *internalist* aspirations of the Rationalist account: its goal was to provide space for, at once, the rationality, from the *first person perspective*, of the transitions involved and the possibility that a first-order mental state could be a *subject’s own* accessible reason for his corresponding self-ascription\(^{35} \) so that, if needed, he could scrutinise and assess it. However, under the aegis of Peacocke’s notion of entitlement, the rationality, from the first-person perspective, of the relevant transitions need not be visible. Visibility would require the movement from a first-order to a second-order mental state to be informed by an appreciation of the rational connection between those states, i.e. by an appreciation of the fact that one’s self-ascription is rational *because* it is arrived at by moving from the appropriate kind of first-order state.\(^{36} \)

To illustrate with our by now standard example: one’s self-ascription of a belief that Italy was a monarchy before World War Two would be rational, from a first-person point of view, only if a subject was aware of the fact that it is formed by transition from the occurrence of one’s first-order mental state of *judging* that that was the case. However, such an


\(^{36}\) Notice that I am not claiming that the rationalising *principles* should be self-consciously, or even tacitly employed by a subject, even less that their *truth* should be appreciated by him in order to have an account of self-knowledge which would be acceptable by internalist lights.
awareness would presuppose the very knowledge (implicit or explicit, as we saw before) of one’s first-order mental state the model was supposed to dispense with. So there is actually no clear sense in which the refurbished proposal could qualify as internalist: although the rationalisers would be internal and even conscious states of a subject, their rationalising role wouldn’t— and, as a matter of fact, couldn’t⁷—it be manifest to him. Hence, they wouldn’t (and couldn’t) play the role of a subject’s own reason for his judgement.

It seems to me that this proposal would better be seen as a form of what may be called ‘Rational Externalism’. Self-ascriptions of intentional states that qualified as knowledgeable under its constraints would amount to knowledge externally construed, simply because the subject would not be required to have any appreciation of the rationalising role his first-order mental states would play with respect to them. Moreover, the relevant self-ascriptions might still qualify as rational because they would be formed in accordance with a priori principles, rather than under merely a posteriori reliable circumstances. Thus, if Rational Externalism was a viable position, it could, in principle, offer escape from the original ‘either by observation, or by inference, or by nothing’ trilemma and vindicate the intuitive thought that self-knowledge is, after all, a genuine cognitive accomplishment. However, the proposal comes at a significant cost, well beyond the price of re-labelling as ‘Rational Externalist’ the view hereby proposed. For the idea that the correct account of the epistemology of self-knowledge might be Rational Externalist would completely subvert the usual terms of the distinction between internalist and externalist conceptions of knowledge and justification. For reflect: on an internalist view, knowledge of any subject matter at all is always dependent on internally available reasons— reasons available to one as such as part of one’s psychological self-knowledge (whether knowledge of one’s experiences, judgements, or of other beliefs). Externalism, by contrast, precisely eschews any such dependence. But if self-knowledge in turn now qualifies as genuine knowledge only on an externalist account of it, the effect is that internalism becomes pointless everywhere: the kind of inner discipline which subjecting knowledge to internal constraints was meant to impose becomes a

⁷ On pain of falling back into either horn of the consciousness dilemma.
charade – for satisfaction of the constraints imposed by this discipline is now something to be externalistically accounted for!

Maybe fans of externalism will welcome this conclusion, but I would expect Peacocke and those who, in following him, were hoping to reach an internistically acceptable epistemology of psychological self-ascriptions, not to be among them.

So, to summarise: I have claimed that the model of self-knowledge proposed in *Being Known* risks presupposing that (implicit or explicit) knowledge of one’s own mental states it was meant to explain; or fails to explain how psychological self-ascriptions are justified by the corresponding first-order mental states. However, when buttressed by central ideas from *The Realm of Reason* the account is stabilised only at the cost not merely of surrendering Peacocke’s professed internalism in the epistemology of psychological self-ascriptions but of contaminating internalist proposals about knowledge of any subject matter at all with an externalist base which, arguably, betrays their whole point.

So long as it is unclear if and why Peacocke, or anyone else, may want to pay this price, it remains that his proposed account rather than resolving the problem of self-knowledge contrives to re-invent it, with a whole new set of uncomfortable alternatives.

Faculty of Letters and Philosophy
University of Modena
Largo Sant’Eufemia 19
41100 Modena
Italy
coliva@unimo.it