

Pristine Inner Experience

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Abstract

Pristine inner experience is defined and discriminated from personality traits, James's stream of consciousness, phenomenal consciousness, eidetic phenomena, attention, and pre-reflective consciousness. Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES), a method aimed at describing pristine inner experience with fidelity, is defined and discriminated from other sampling methods, think-aloud, and introspection. The main features of DES (the iterative aspect, bracketing of presuppositions) are discussed and the main findings of DES are described. Replies to criticisms and questions about the DES method are provided.

1. Pristine inner experience

Pristine inner experience is Russell Hurlburt's (2011; Hurlburt & Akhter, 2006) term for naturally occurring directly-apprehended-at-a-moment experience.

The unmodified term *experience* has widely discrepant senses, as divergent as the *experience* of pain from stepping on a stone and the *experience* of growing up in the Internet age. Hurlburt applies the modifier *inner* with the intention of limiting *inner* experience to experience that is directly apprehended at some particular moment: now, before the footlights of my consciousness, I see in my imagination a castle in Spain; now, before the footlights of my consciousness, I feel the pebble-induced foot pain; now, before the footlights of my consciousness, I see the golden orange of the sunset. Because each is directly apprehended at some moment, innerly seeing a castle in Spain, feeling a pebble-stepping pain, and seeing the sunset each counts as inner experience.

By contrast, the experience of growing up in the Internet age has no directly-apprehended-at-some-particular-moment-ness (that is, there is no *now-before-the-footlights-of-my-consciousness-I* experience growing up in the Internet age), so the growing-up-in-the-Internet-age experience is not *inner* experience. The experience of taking a cruise to Antarctica has no directly-apprehended-at-some-particular-moment-ness (that is, there is no *now-before-the-footlights-of-my-consciousness-I* experience taking a cruise to Antarctica), so taking a cruise is not *inner* experience. There are many individual inner experiences that occur on the cruise (now I see the glacier in the distance; now I feel the biting cold swirl inside my parka; now I feel empathy toward a solitary penguin), but the cruise itself is not inner experience.

Hurlburt's use of *inner* applies to any directly-apprehended-at-some-particular-moment experience: the pebble and the sunset are, of course, external objects/events, but the directly

apprehended pain and directly apprehended golden-orangeness are inner experiences. They are inner because it is my inner processes that foreground the pain or the golden orangeness. By *directly apprehended*, Hurlburt means immediately present, before the footlights of consciousness. Barefoot, I step on the pebble and directly apprehend pain; the pain presents itself to me. By *directly apprehended* Hurlburt *excludes* physical characteristics of the object (I do *not* directly apprehend that it is 9.4 mm in diameter, that it has irregular pointy geometry); excludes characterizations of underlying neurophysical processes (I do *not* directly apprehend the nociceptors or the electrical impulses traveling through peripheral nerves to the thalamus); excludes psychological processes (I do *not* directly apprehend any theories that the degree of pain depends on my expectations, prior occurrences, etc.); and so on.

By *at a particular moment*, Hurlburt refers to concrete, particular phenomenal occurrences, excluding such things as generalizations (*whenever* I step on a pebble I feel...) or speculations (I *might* feel...). *At a particular moment* does *not* necessarily mean *brief*. It is possible, for example, for the experience of pain to persist unbroken for several minutes or longer; such a long-duration experience counts as inner experience provided that it is directly (ongoingly) apprehended *at the moment* under consideration.

Hurlburt applies the modifier *pristine* with the intention of limiting *pristine* inner experience to spontaneously occurring, everyday, unmanipulated, natural-environment inner experience. The golden-orangeness of the sunset that happens to strike me while walking on a beach is pristine inner experience. By contrast, if a smog researcher had sent me to report the exact color of sunset-orange by comparing it to a color wheel, that golden-orangeness would *not* be pristine inner experience. The inner experiences that occur as a result of an investigator's demand ("compare the sunset-orange to the color wheel"; "imagine your breakfast table";

“innerly say ‘elephant’”), experimental manipulation (perform a repetitive task designed to be particularly boring), or the premeditated attempt to observe inner experience are *not pristine* inner experiences.

This use of *pristine* is similar to calling a forest *pristine*—in its natural condition, free of asphalt trails and clear-cut logging. The region of Yellowstone around Old Faithful is *not* a pristine forest: it has a visitor center and miles of maintained trails. By contrast, the Thorofare region (the southeast corner of Yellowstone) is pristine—it is 30 miles from the nearest road.

The term *pristine* does *not* mean clean or pure—much of a pristine forest is mucky and bloody.

The term *pristine* does not require perfection: the Thorofare region deserves to be called pristine even if you discover a plastic bottle there.

Pristine inner experience fluctuates. Viewing the well-known Rubin’s faces-vase ambiguous figure naturally alternates every second or so between seeing faces and seeing the vase. In a crowded cocktail party, now I am primarily hearing what Eric is saying about his trip to India; (a second or so later) now I am attracted to the pretty purple of the candlestick there on the mantel (and am mostly indifferent to what Eric continues to say); (a second or so later) now I am in my imagination seeing the Eiffel Tower (and am mostly indifferent to Eric but the candlestick-purple continues to grab my attention); (a second or so later) now I am innerly saying “get gasoline,” understood to be an instruction for the drive home (and now am mostly indifferent to Eric, the Tower, and the candlestick); and so on.

Pristine inner experiences are evanescent, usually forgotten (like dreams on waking) soon after their occurrence.

Pristine inner experiences are not necessarily unitary. There may be several simultaneously overlapping experiences, which themselves may be asynchronous. In the above example, I was innerly seeing the Eiffel Tower and *simultaneously* but separately, taken in by the purple of the candlestick.

Pristine inner experience is sometimes but not always clear. The innerly seen Eiffel tower might be clear, colorful, detailed, and in motion—seen pedestrians milling around its grassy park. But the inner seeing might be inchoate—the innerly seen Eiffel Tower might be an unformed bronzeness against an unformed greenness. The innerly spoken “get gasoline” might be clearly apprehended in my own voice with an implied exclamation point, but might be recognized as innerly spoken without any vocal characteristics.

Because pristine inner experiences are private experiences created by me, of me, and for me alone, and because they fluctuate, are evanescent, and are forgotten soon after their occurrence, and because they must be naturally occurring and unmanipulated, pristine experience is difficult, arguably impossible, to examine and to submit to scientific or analytic consideration. However, that does not undercut the existence of nor the importance of the phenomenon.

1.1 Pristine inner experience and personality/capacity

Pristine inner experiences are directly-apprehended-as-ongoing-at-particular-moments phenomena. By contrast, personality traits (e.g., conscientiousness, extraversion, persistence) and cognitive capacities (e.g., intelligence, executive functioning, self-regulation) are inferred (not directly apprehended) and presumed to be enduring characteristics, not phenomena.

Therefore, traits and capacities are *not* pristine inner experiences. For example, conscientiousness is *not* directly apprehended; instead, it is inferred from organization (itself inferred from observable behaviors such as planning ahead and avoidance of clutter), diligence

(itself inferred from observing sustained effort and not procrastinating), and dependability (itself inferred from showing up on time and not making excuses).

1.2 Pristine inner experience and James's stream of consciousness

William James (1890), in his discussion of the stream of thought (in 1892, he published essentially identical text that referred to the stream of *consciousness* instead of the stream of *thought*), distinguished between the “substantive” and the “transitive” states of mind. James held that the stream of thought/consciousness is like a bird's life: a sequence of perchings (the substantive parts), between which are flights to the next perch (the transitive parts). James held that the substantive parts are the important aspects of consciousness, and that “it is very difficult, introspectively, to see the transitive parts for what they really are” (James, 1890, p. 243; also 1892, p. 160) because any attempt at grasping a transitive part is like “trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks” (James, 1890, p. 244; also 1892, p. 161). In the following passage, *A* and *Z* are the substantive parts, and the various trains are the transitive parts. The transitive parts, said James, are very different from one person to the next:

Let *A* be some experience from which a number of thinkers start. Let *Z* be the practical conclusion rationally inferrible from it. One gets to this conclusion by one line, another by another; one follows a course of English, another of German, verbal imagery. With one, visual images predominate; with another, tactile. Some trains are tinged with emotions, others not; some are very abridged, synthetic and rapid; others, hesitating and broken into many steps. But when the penultimate terms of all the trains, however differing *inter se*, finally shoot into the same conclusion, we say, and rightly say, that all the thinkers have had substantially the same thought. It would probably astound each of them beyond measure to be let into his neighbor's mind and to find how different the

scenery there was from that in his own. (James, 1890, pp. 269-270; also 1892, pp. 169-170)

The transitive parts, James's "probably astound[ing] scenery," are the pristine inner experiences. As James said, these transitive parts/pristine experiences might be verbal, visual, tactile, emotional, and so on. Their apprehension is difficult, if not impossible (but modern technology might allow "turning up the gas" quickly enough).

1.3 Pristine inner experience and phenomenal consciousness

Phenomenal consciousness is the philosopher's term for the qualitative or subjective aspect of consciousness—the "what it is like" to experience something (Block, 1995).

"Phenomenal consciousness" refers to the class of directly apprehended phenomena; on that view, phenomenal consciousness seems to be the same thing as pristine inner experience.

However, in practice, contemplations of phenomenal consciousness are very different from contemplations of pristine inner experience. Considerations of phenomenal consciousness are generally rational/logical/analytic attempts to characterize with general applicability the subjective experience of being in a certain mental state, whereas considerations of pristine inner experience are generally descriptive attempts to characterize with specificity and fidelity pristine inner experiences as they are apprehended at some moment.

Philosophers' discussions of consciousness generally begin something like this:

When I have a conscious experience of the blue sky, there is something it is like for me to have the experience. In particular, there is a bluish way it is like for me to have it. This "bluish way it is like for me" constitutes the phenomenal character of my experience.

Phenomenal character is the property that makes a phenomenally conscious state (i) the

phenomenally conscious state it is and (ii) a phenomenally conscious state at all.

(Kriegel, 2009, p. 1)

Kriegel's interest here is in defining/delineating the concept of *phenomenal consciousness*. His reference to bluish is incidental—"bluish" is something taken for granted as being understood by his reader and of interest only to the extent that it supports his intention to delineate *phenomenal consciousness* as a universal, enduring concept within the field of consciousness. In short, the directly apprehended phenomena themselves (e.g., bluish) are understood as being relatively obvious and noncontroversial; the rational/logical/analytic effort is at refining the concept of *phenomenal consciousness*.

By contrast, a focus on pristine inner experience is the attempt to describe whatever phenomena are directly apprehended by (e.g.) Kriegel at some moment, with no further interest in any conceptual refinement. At 10:42:11 (let's say), Kriegel is walking outside under a partly-cloudy-mostly-blue sky and his eyeballs are aimed upwards. He is "lost in thought" about what counts as an ontological category, and the sky (whether blue or not) does not at all present itself to him. A bit later, still outside at 10:42:22, eyeballs aimed upwards, he innerly says "2:30 should be good," a reference to his plan to play tennis that afternoon; the mostly-cloudless-ness of the sky presents itself to him as favorable weather; the blue-ness of the sky contributes to the mostly-cloudless-favorable-for-tennis experience, but bluish-ness is *not* a major aspect of this experience. A bit later, still outside at 10:42:33, eyeballs aimed upwards, he is drawn to the blueness—the blueness completely occupies his experience (and the sky-ness and mostly-cloudless-favorable-for-tennis-ness is largely if not completely irrelevant). Those three pristine inner experiences are very different from each other, even though the sky is the same and the spectrum of light falling on Kriegel's retina is the same. That is, the interest in pristine inner

experience aspires to apprehend and describe inner experience as it is, regardless of whether or to what extent bluish presents itself—if bluish is strong, as at 10:42:33, then certainly that should be part of the description of inner experience; but if bluish does not present itself, as at 10:42:11, then it should not be part of the description. That is, the interest in pristine inner experience does *not* take the experience of *bluish* for granted; it does *not* attempt to refine the concept of *phenomenal consciousness* nor opine on how phenomenal consciousness contributes or does not contribute to the understanding of consciousness.

In sum, *phenomenal consciousness* and *pristine inner experience* likely refer to the same kinds of directly apprehended phenomena. But those who focus on phenomenal consciousness head *away from* the directly apprehended phenomena themselves (which they mostly take for granted) and toward the rational/logical/analytic consideration of the relationships between phenomenal consciousness as a construct and other constructs in consciousness and beyond. By contrast, those who focus on pristine inner experience head *toward* directly apprehended phenomena (working relentlessly to bracket any taking-for-granted-ness about those phenomena), seeking to describe with fidelity each of those phenomena as they individually present themselves. In doing so, they *suspend* any regard for any rational/logical/analytic consideration of the relationships between those phenomena and anything else, including other topics in consciousness.

Some would say that the distinction between pristine inner experience and phenomenal consciousness is mainly methodological—pristine inner experience explorations require a method like descriptive experience sampling (Hurlburt, 2011; described below), whereas phenomenal consciousness studies generally use a solo-introspection method. However, the distinction is more basic than that: the interest in pristine inner experience is in the individual

phenomena themselves, whereas the interest in phenomenal consciousness is in the relationship between the class of those phenomena and some larger ontological interest.

Therefore: pristine inner experiences are specific phenomena examinable individually with the intention of fidelity. Phenomenal consciousness is a characterization of a general kind of phenomenon examinable as a class as part of the consideration of relationships to other kinds of phenomena.

1.4 Pristine inner experience and eidetic phenomenology

The aim of eidetic phenomenology is to describe what is essential (eidetic) about experience. By *essential*, eidetic phenomenologists mean those invariant, purely given characteristics that make “something itself, *completely and precisely as it is in itself*” (Husserl, 1913/1983, p. 154; original italics). If Husserl were interested in the essence of anger, for example (see Husserl, 1913/1983, §70), he would recommend imagining a variety of situations which involve anger (“free phantasies”) until the contingent, inessential features fade away and the essentiality of anger, that which is invariant across all the anger phantasies, remains.

An interest in pristine inner experience is the diametric opposite of any eidetic interest. The aim of the interest in pristine inner experience is to apprehend and describe the contingent, inessential features of inner experience, while suspending any consideration about how this particular experience might or might not reflect any essential quality. The aim of the eidetic interest is to apprehend the essential, while suspending any consideration of the contingent or the accidental.

For example, pristine inner experience is *not* concerned with the essence of anger; it is concerned with the high-fidelity description of this particular (contingent, accidental) directly apprehended inner experience. If that experience includes anger, then the aim will be to describe

the anger aspects of that experience in a way that faithfully conveys what directly presented itself in that particular experience. If the experience as apprehended involves an entirely idiosyncratic anger, then the aim will be to describe that idiosyncratic anger without regard for the degree to which it does or does not reflect any essential characteristic of anger.

1.5 Pristine inner experience and attention

Since James (1890, 1892), attention has been regarded as the mind's selecting one train of thought or experience out of many available or competing possibilities. Pristine inner experience shares the many-available-possibilities aspect but brackets any notion that there must be only one (or a few) chosen train(s) and that there is only one "mind" making the choice.

The term/concept of *attention* requires or at least suggests the existence of a Cartesian-theater-like version of consciousness—a viewer separate from the thing viewed. Pristine inner experience has no such suggestion; the experience is directly apprehended by the experiencer, not viewed by or presented to some sort of mental process.

1.6 Pristine inner experience and reflective consciousness

Depraz et al. (2003) held that much of what people live through as they engage in activities is not accessible to verbal description—that is, is not part of what they term reflective consciousness. They termed these unrecognized experiences "pre-reflective" (Vermersch 1994, later elaborated by Petitmengin, 2006).

Pristine inner experience shares with pre-reflective experience the fact that neither is easily available to retrospection; therefore, each requires a method designed to capture those experiences. However, because pre-reflective experience is understood as never having been directly apprehended whereas pristine inner experience is understood as having been directly apprehended at some particular moment but soon thereafter forgotten, the method employed to

discover pre-reflective experience (microphenomenology; Petitmengin et al., 2019) is very different from the method designed to uncover pristine inner experience (descriptive experience sampling). Microphenomenology (earlier called the “elicitation interview method” or the “explicitation interview” method) aims to make the pre-reflective reflective—to re-enact experiences so that what was originally unrecognized can become recognized. Descriptive experience sampling, by contrast, aims to improve the participant’s ability to notice and describe what is already directly apprehended. Hurlburt and Akhter (2006) contrasted microphenomenology and descriptive experience sampling.

2. Describing pristine inner experience: Descriptive experience sampling

Hurlburt’s technique for describing pristine inner experience is called descriptive experience sampling (DES) and has been described elsewhere (Hurlburt, 2011; Hurlburt & Heavey, 2006). In 1973, Hurlburt invented a beeper (Hurlburt, 1976), the object of which was to deliver a rapid-rise-time tone (a “beep”) that might allow “turning up the gas quickly enough” to allow apprehending (at least some) aspects of pristine inner experience.

In brief: DES uses a random beep in the natural environment to identify a particular experience; the investigators conduct an “expositional interview” where they ask the “one legitimate question about inner experience” (Hurlburt & Heavey, 2006): *What, if anything, was in your experience at the moment of the beep?* followed by clarifying and disambiguating complementary questions. That question is *open-beginninged* (Hurlburt & Heavey, 2006) in that it does not specify in advance any desired topic or characteristic. Participants are nearly always unskilled at cleaving to *the moment* (where *to cleave* is “to adhere firmly and closely or loyally and unwaveringly”; Merriam-Webster, n.d.) and cleaving to *experience*, but they can gradually acquire those skills through the *iterative* process (Hurlburt, 2009), which is necessary for

adequate description—the language about inner experience requires iterative training to become adequate (Hurlburt & Heavey, 2001). The aim is to provide an *idiographic* characterization of an individual's pristine inner experience, where by *idiographic* DES means reflecting the individual participant's experience regardless of whether it is similar to or different from other individuals.

DES characterizations aspire to fidelity. They do not aspire to be accurate or correct, because accuracy and correctness require an impossible degree of perfection.

Because of its iterative nature, the DES participant and investigator learn together, on days 1, 2, ..., $n - 1$, how to apprehend and describe the participant's experience on day n . This is a joint, first-person-*plural* effort, metaphorically like a submarine crew's firing a torpedo. There is only one person (the Officer of the Deck) looking through the periscope, but it is the team doing the firing. In a fundamentally joint manner, the team participates/shapes what the OOD sees—the OOD learns to see and describe what is important to the team (distance, bearing, target outline, etc.). The OOD is the *seeing* cog in the joint effort. Similarly, DES should be considered a first-person-plural process (Hurlburt and Akhter, 2006), creating not *participant reports* but rather *joint descriptions*.

DES seeks to bracket presuppositions that interfere with the high-fidelity apprehension of pristine inner experience. For example, many people believe that their inner experience involves a constant (or at least incessant) inner voice (a monolog- or dialog-commentary on their situation and desires, etc). DES would be happy to find such monolog/dialog if it exists, but a major part of the iterative method is acquiring the skills to bracket (set aside) that *presupposition* of an inner voice so that inner experience can be apprehended as it is, either with or without an inner voice. There are many such presuppositions, each a personal mini or major delusion about one's own inner experience; some presuppositions exaggerate a feature whereas other presuppositions

downplay a feature. To bracket a presupposition is *not* to claim that a description is a misrepresentation of experience; to bracket is to put out of play the presupposition so that the apprehension of pristine inner experience is not distorted by the presupposition.

The DES aspiration is to bracket all presuppositions that interfere with the apprehension and description of pristine inner experience, but DES accepts that it does *not* actually accomplish that aspiration. Furthermore, DES accepts that pristine inner experience itself is doubtless extensively shaped by a person's presuppositions. DES aspires to minimize presupposition-fueled distortions in the *apprehension* and *description* of pristine inner experience, not in the pristine inner experience itself.

2.1 Descriptive experience sampling and other non-DES sampling methods

There are many studies, usually called “experience sampling method” (ESM; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1977) or “ecological momentary assessment” (EMA; Stone & Shiffman, 1994), that use beepers in natural environments. However, they differ radically from DES in that they typically administer questionnaires, do not involve open-beginning interviews, and do not provide any iterative training. ESM and EMA may contact participants between sampling days to verify compliance, but they do not engage in expositional-interview-type discussions that seek to improve the cleaving to the moment, cleaving to experience, and the bracketing of presuppositions; that is, ESM and EMA samplings are repetitive but not iterative.

Some would see a similarity between DES and think aloud (TA: Ericsson & Simon, 1993) methods, but the differences are greater than the similarities: TA generally characterizes underlying cognitive processes (e.g., problem-solving strategies, decision making, causation) by interpreting a demanded verbal stream, whereas DES describes directly apprehended phenomena with as little demand and interpretation as possible.

2.2 DES findings about pristine inner experience

The overarching result of DES studies is that most people, before they undergo the iterative training of DES, do not know the characteristics of their own inner experience. For example, those people who adamantly believe they talk to themselves all the time often discover using DES that their own self-talk is actually relatively rare or non-existent. This is not a matter of definition or opinion—they apply their own personal definitions and discover by examining their own experience that it differs from their own expectations (Hurlburt, 2011).

A corollary of people-don't-know-the-characteristics-of-their-own-experience is that questionnaire results are hugely discrepant from DES results. For example, Hurlburt et al. (2022) found that questionnaires typically estimate the average frequency of inner speaking as about 60 percent of the time, whereas DES sampling of the same individuals found that inner speaking occurs only about 20 percent of the time.

A second corollary of people-don't-know-the-characteristics-of-their-own-experience is that DES sometimes describes phenomena that experiential scientists find difficult to believe. For example, Hurlburt (1993) described the experience of “Fran,” who had as many as ten simultaneous visual images, each of a very different scene/situation. Furthermore, Fran’s inner and external seeings had no figure/ground phenomena—ambiguous figures such as Rubin’s faces/vase bistable figure and the Necker cube did not alternate for Fran. (This was not the result of a failure of Fran’s descriptive abilities—she described accurately how those figures alternated for her co-workers.) Furthermore, Fran routinely watched three television sets simultaneously—not alternating back and forth but watching all three at once. Hurlburt (1993) understood this as multiple parallel perceptual organizations, not divided attention. Fran’s experience is unusually multiple, but by DES standards her multiplicity is by no means unique. Many experiential

scientists believe that such multiplicity is impossible, a belief Hurlburt attributes to be an artifact of the widespread use of introspective methods that oversimplify inner experience. If DES is credited as being a careful method of apprehending phenomena, then surprising results should be understood at least as suggesting the possibility of a prevalent misconception.

DES considers pristine inner experiences and their description to be fundamentally idiographic. Nonetheless, Hurlburt and his colleagues maintain that there are five frequent phenomena (5FP; Kühn, Fernyhough, & Alderson-Day, 2014) that are often found in DES studies: inner speaking, inner seeing, unsymbolized thinking, feelings, and sensory awareness. Each of the 5FP occur in roughly a quarter of all samples (but Hurlburt, 2011, recognizes that his samples are not large and not cross-culturally representative). Hurlburt and his colleagues (Heavey & Hurlburt, 2008) note that there are large individual differences in 5FP frequency: each of the 5FP ranges from zero to 100% across people.

Inner speaking (a.k.a. inner speech, inner monolog, inner dialog; Hurlburt, Heavey, & Kelsey, 2013) is the experience of speaking without external sound. Typically, inner speaking is experienced as being in the person's own voice, but there are many variants. Inner speaking is *not* primarily an auditory phenomenon—it is the experience of speaking, *not* of hearing oneself speak (although that does sometimes happen). Hurlburt prefers the verb *speaking* to the noun *speech* because the experience is of an action: inner speaking is something you *do*, not a thing you engage in.

Inner seeing (a.k.a. seeing an image) is the experience of imaginarily seeing—the thing seen is understood to be not present and not seen in the external world. Hurlburt (1993) distinguished between innerly seeing and seeing an image: when seeing an image, the image itself has properties (e.g., borders, surface imperfections), whereas when innerly seeing, there is

usually no experienced thing-ness of the image itself. There are some individuals whose experience deserves to be called seeing an image (e.g., Hurlburt, 1990, described individuals with schizophrenia whose inner experiences included images where the image itself was seen to curl up at the edges and float away).

Unsymbolized thinking (likely the phenomenon behind the “imageless thought” debate in early introspectionism; Hurlburt & Akhter, 2008) is the directly apprehended experience of thinking *without* any simultaneous apprehension of words, things seen, and so on.

Unsymbolized thinking is clearly apprehended—it is *not* a gist or a hunch—and can be quite complex. For example, it can be as detailed as *I’ll have a hot dog with ketchup, mustard, relish, and onion*, where each element (hot dog, ketchup, mustard, etc.) is directly apprehended as being individually experientially listed but without the word or image of the hot dog, or the ketchup, or the mustard, and so on.

Feeling (Heavey, Hurlburt, & Lefforge, 2012) is the experience of emotion. Emotion is understood as a process involving hormones, muscles, and so on; emotion can occur without being directly experienced, that is, without being a *feeling*. Feeling is a direct apprehension that is understood to be of emotion. *I feel angry* is the direct apprehension of anger that is presumed to reflect an underlying emotion of anger. Feelings are sometimes felt as being bodily and sometimes as being “mental” (by *mental*, DES means directly apprehended but not felt in the body). Mental feelings are roughly as frequent, and no less vibrant or powerful, as bodily feelings. (It is presumed that there is some bodily process underlying mental feelings, even though the bodily aspects are not directly apprehended.)

Sensory awareness (Hurlburt, Heavey, & Bensaheb, 2009) is the direct apprehension of an (inner or outer) sensory aspect that is apprehended for its own interest rather than for its

instrumental value. If, as I reach for an apple, I am drawn to, attracted to, particularly notice its deep redness, then the deep redness is a sensory awareness. By contrast, if I reach for the same deep red apple but experience the apple as the target of my reach, then the deep redness is *not* a sensory awareness.

DES does *not* consider the 5FP to be building blocks or discrete elements of inner experience. Experiences with the characteristics of one or another of the 5FP are frequently described, and therefore it is reasonable to provide a uniform naming for such experiences. However, each of the 5FP comes in a wide variety of variants. Inner speaking can be in my voice or that of another; it can be inflected or monotone; it can have words missing (including all the words—that is, it is possible to have the experience of speaking without speaking any words at all); it can be understood to take place in the head (or in the front of the head, or in the back of the head) or in the body; it can be (usually is) in full sentences, but can be abbreviated; it can be experienced as being aimed at oneself or at another person or neither. Elicited inner speaking (as when an experimenter commands “Say ‘elephant’”) probably has different fMRI-measured brain patterns from naturally occurring (pristine) inner speaking (Hurlburt et al., 2016). Similar variabilities can be described for the other 5FP.

2.3 Criticisms and concerns

All introspection is fraught. Reply: That is a defensible point of view, and under it, all introspection should be excluded from scientific consideration (as by the behaviorists). However, most observers are not persuaded by that view because they consider inner experience to be an important aspect of the human condition. Furthermore, DES is *not* introspection as an attempt “to directly access one’s own internal psychological processes, judgments, perceptions, or states” (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Pristine inner experiences are directly apprehended

phenomena and do not (at least not necessarily) access processes, judgments, perceptions, or states.

All first-person reports are private, and therefore it is not possible to examine their fidelity. Reply: Hurlburt (2011) accepted that pristine inner experience is fundamentally (at least at the current state of the art) private. However, the DES first-person-*plural* collaboration (see above) can be public (e.g., Hurlburt, 2025) so that the adequacy of the collaboration can be examined.

The concept of “pristine” inner experience is philosophically naïve. Pristine inner experience cannot be pre-theoretical, given that introspective access, attentional stabilization, and descriptive articulation already presuppose conceptual, methodological, and cultural frameworks. No self-report is pristine—all self-reports are already filtered through language and cultural expectations. Reply: DES does *not* hold that pristine inner experience is pre-theoretical—inner experience is accepted as the agglomeration of all sorts of self-theories, interests, cultural factors, and so on. DES *aspires* to provide atheoretical *descriptions* of those phenomena but accepts that it always falls short (Hurlburt, 2011). DES *does* try, through its iterative bracketing, to reduce the impact of large distortions in reports. It clarifies and disambiguates language—it does not assume a shared vocabulary, and instead is sensitive to the possibility that common words are used in idiosyncratic ways and is ready to inquire about whether those words rest easily on experience. For example, if a participant says “I was talking to myself,” the DES interviewer might ask something like “what exact words were you saying?” as a way to discover how the participant is using the word “talking.” DES implements many features intended to support the bracketing of theories, for example randomly sampling the experiences to be examined; using multiple co-investigators whose explicit and valued task is to

notice and temper their colleagues' explicit or implicit theories; using as co-investigators introspection-skeptics (Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2007) and those with alternative points of view (Caracciolo & Hurlburt, 2016; Hurlburt & Piccinini in Part XIII of Hurlburt, 2025).

Pristine experience is not necessarily verbal, but descriptions of pristine experience are in words. Therefore, descriptions of pristine inner experience always fall short. Reply: Hurlburt (2011) agreed. He maintained that descriptions of pristine experience (as by DES) are *not*, and do not aspire to be, accurate or correct; they aspire to be faithful (i.e., pointing in the direction of pristine experience without misleading or misrepresenting).

Nonverbal humans and animals may have pristine experience. Reply: Hurlburt (2011) agreed that the range of convenience of DES does not include such instances, so DES is silent about such possibilities.

DES is not the epistemic tribunal. Reply: Hurlburt (Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2011) agreed. He has tried to make public how DES operates so that its deliverances and shortcomings can be examined (Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2007; Caracciolo & Hurlburt, 2016; Hurlburt, 2025).

DES samples only a few bits of inner experience and yet generalizes about a person's overall inner world. Reply: Hurlburt (2011) noted that DES does *not* seek to describe the essence or the whole being. DES is like fishing, where the task is to describe carefully the fish that are caught without claiming that it has caught all the kinds of fish in the lake.

DES disturbs experience—the participant knows they are wearing a beeper and must describe their experience. Reply: DES is like parachuting into a pristine forest: surely the descent will cause some critters to scurry away, but others can still be observed in their pretty-much-natural habitats.

The DES process uses only small samples, thus limiting generalizability. Reply: That is currently true. DES might best be thought of as a demonstration of principle, rather than an influential set of findings. Hurlburt (2011) observed that a mature science of experience might invest resources in careful investigations of inner experience. DES is indeed labor intensive, but that, Hurlburt argued, should not prevent its use. For example, science invests many millions of dollars in MRI hardware; it could invest millions of dollars in careful experiential investigations.

DES does not provide a theory of consciousness. Reply: That is correct, just as a microscope does not provide a theory of biological processes.

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