

The Self in Prereflexive Self-Consciousness: Self-Concernment without Self-Reference

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explain the phenomenological concept of prereflexive self-consciousness in positive and constructive terms, using minimal analytical tools. The first step in this direction is the adoption of an adverbial theory of self-consciousness, inspired by the adverbial theory of perception. The adverbial theory of perception replaces the controversial sense-data theory of perception. We do not see a "blue sense datum" but rather perceive something "in a blue-like manner." By analogy, we propose that prereflexive intransitive self-consciousness is not a representation of the thinking or perceiving subject. Instead, prereflexive self-consciousness is a peculiar way in which the subject performs an act of thinking or perceiving. The second step is to use Perry's framework of the "unarticulated constituent" to further clarify this claim. However, we will not rely on Perry's original view but on Recanati's critical review. We will argue that the adverbial characterization of prereflexive self-consciousness as "the first-person way of experiencing or thinking" means that the subjectless content of one's representation must be assessed within a broad context to which the subject necessarily belongs. This is what we call "self-concernment without self-reference."

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Setting the Stage

In contrast to the entire philosophical tradition, which has always regarded the phenomenon of self-consciousness as the result of self-reflection, the phenomenological tradition from Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty proposes a more fundamental form of prereflexive self-consciousness. What do they mean by this?

The central concept that all phenomenologists share is that to comprehend what it means to be a self, one must examine the structure of experience and vice versa. This means that the exploration of self and experience should be combined to grasp both. More precisely, it is argued that the core self has an experiential reality because it is closely tied to the ego perspective and is identified with the first-personal mode of presentation of experience. In its most basic form, self-consciousness is about having first-personal access to one's consciousness; it is about the first-personal presentation or manifestation of experiential life. This first-personal presentation is not incidental but essential and renders experience subjective. Despite the existence of various kinds of sensory experiences and different types of experiential modes of presentation, there are common elements. Whether an experience is perceived as mine or not hinges on its mode of presentation. If the experience is presented to me in the I-form, it is perceived as mine; otherwise, it is not. Being conscious of oneself is not about grasping a pure subject that exists apart from the stream of consciousness but about being conscious of an experience in its I-form. The self is not something that exists beyond or in opposition to the stream of experiences; it is a feature or function of their presentation, the constant dimension of the first-personal mode of presentation in the variety of changing experiences (see Zahavi, 2009).

Apart from Sartre's "Transcendence of the Ego" (1956), prereflexive or intransitive self-consciousness should not be seen as the consciousness of a detached, worldless self, nor is the self hidden in the head. Prereflective or intransitive self-consciousness does not mean that one interrupts one's engagement with the world in order to turn inward; rather, prereflexive self-consciousness is always the consciousness of a self that is immersed in the world. The self is only truly present to itself when it is actively engaged in the world. Therefore, it would be a great mistake to interpret the phenomenological concept of a core or minimal self as a Cartesian mental residue that implies self-contained and self-sufficient interiority. The phenomenological understanding of the self is consistent with a strong emphasis on the fundamental intentionality or in-the-world nature (Merleau-Ponty's *being-in-the-world*) of consciousness.¹

In its current form, however, the concept of prereflective self-consciousness faces two challenges. First, when the description of prereflective self-consciousness is not unambiguous, it is only framed negatively. Consider the following examples: prereflective self-consciousness is a form of self-consciousness that does not depend on reflection, does not represent the subject, does

¹ Barbaras (1991), for example, claims that prereflective consciousness is not described positively and thus involves a tacit form of intellectualism (Barbaras 1991, 24ff) In its present form, however, the concept of prereflexive self-consciousness faces two challenges. First, when the description of prereflexive self-consciousness is clear, it is usually phrased negatively.

not reify the subject, etc. However, when it comes to a positive description of prereflective self-consciousness, we find only vague and metaphorical terms such as "omnipresence," "sense of ownership," "mineness," "first-person mode of presentation," etc. The situation becomes even more confusing when we face the claim that this prereflective or intransitive form of self-consciousness underlies all ordinary forms of intentional consciousness. So, we seem to know with some clarity what prereflective or intransitive self-consciousness is not, while we do not know exactly what prereflective or intransitive self-consciousness actually is.

Given the lack of a clear positive characterization, it seems pointless to some critics to speak of primitive, pre-conceptual, prereflexive, and ubiquitous self-consciousness without some kind of cognitive self-reference, i.e., reflection. Since we are always conscious even when we are not thinking or reflecting on ourselves, what phenomenologists mean by the fancy name "prereflective self-consciousness" is nothing but "simple phenomenal consciousness" (as opposed to Block's access consciousness). For example, when I experience the color red, there is always something for me that is what it is like to experience red. When I experience pain, there is always something *for me* that is what it is like to feel pain. When I listen to the B minor Mass, there is always something *for me* that is what it is like to listen to the B minor Mass.

This essay aims to provide a positive and constructive account of the phenomenological concept of prereflexive, intransitive self-consciousness. The goal is to "unpack" the pre-philosophical intuitions of the phenomenological tradition about the self. The first step in this direction is to adopt an adverbial theory of self-consciousness along the lines of the well-known adverbial theory of perception. The adverbial theory replaces the controversial sense-data theory of perception. Accordingly, we do not see a "blue sense datum" but something "in a blue-like manner." By analogy, we would like to propose the following: since intransitive self-consciousness is not a representation of the thinking or perceiving subject, intransitive self-consciousness is a peculiar way in which I perform an intentional act.

To address this question, we need semantic tools. We will use the framework proposed by [John Perry \(1986\)](#), who is known for having introduced the notion of the "unarticulated constituent" of a proposition. However, we will not rely on Perry's original proposal but on the critical review by François [Recanati \(1997\)](#). We will argue that the adverbial characterization of intransitive self-consciousness as "the I-form of experiencing or thinking" means that if one does not represent oneself, the subjectless content of one's representation has to be assessed in a broad circumstance of evaluation to which the subject necessarily belongs. When I listen to J.S. Bach, I do not represent myself as a listener. However, I have the experience of listening to Bach in a "self-conscious way." But what exactly does that mean? The adverb "self-conscious way" functions as a sentential operator that determines the embodied and embedded subject as an essential part of the circumstance of evaluation of the represented content. This means that there are at least two ways in which we can represent a given content (e.g., Bach's B minor Mass): in an indifferent, detached way and in an engaged way, that is, embodied and embedded.

We have divided the rest of this article into five further sections and one conclusion. In the following first section, we present the traditional Fichtean paradox as the historical motivation for the phenomenological postulation of a primitive intransitive form of self-consciousness, namely, to avoid the vicious circle of self-reflection.

In the second section, we present the original phenomenological insight of intransitive self-consciousness. Since this insight is usually characterized only in negative form, we present our first positive reading in the following third section: adverbialism.

But this is certainly not enough to grasp the original phenomenological insight. Therefore, in the fourth section, we explain this form of adverbialism with Perry's notion of the "unarticulated constituent" of propositional content. Yet, distancing ourselves from Perry's original account and endorsing Recanati's review, we argue that the place of the subject is not within the representational content but rather in the broader circumstance of evaluating the subjectless content of experience. This is what we call self-involvement without self-reflection. In the penultimate section, I show that this self-involvement without self-reference is nothing but our self-embodiment and self-embeddedness in a certain environment that dispenses with self-representation, in the sense of Heidegger's *In-der-Welt-Sein* and Merleau-Ponty's "tacit cogito" as *being-in-the-world*. In the final section, we summarize the achievements with concluding remarks.

1. The Original Motivation

We begin this paper by recalling some trivial distinctions about the notion of self-consciousness in contemporary literature. Suppose, for example, that Oedipus, now king of Thebes, is investigating the murder of his father, Laius when the following thought occurs to him:

- 1) Laius' murderer must feel guilty.

Considering that Oedipus turns out to be Laius' murderer, his first thought (1) refers to himself, even if he has no idea of this fact. As anyone familiar with the most popular of classical tragedies knows, the situation changes tragically for Oedipus when he comes to his senses and realizes that he is the murderer of Laius, the former king of Thebes. Worst of all, he also realizes that Laius is his father and that Jocasta, Laius' wife, is his mother. Oedipus thinks in horror:

- 2) There is no guilt greater than mine!

For our purposes, we have the following. Oedipus represents himself when he thinks (1), even if he is not aware of this reference (or self-conscious), because this only happens when he thinks (2). In contemporary philosophy, thought (2) is usually referred to as an I-thought and its propositional content as "de se" content. In contrast, (1) is merely a thought that "accidentally" refers to the subject who utters it, that is, a thought that contains an unconscious self-reference and whose propositional content can be either "de dicto" (if it is a definite description such as "the murderer of") or "de re" (if it is an anaphoric deictic such as "this guy").

According to a long and living tradition (in the past, the so-called "theory of reflection," and in contemporary philosophy, the so-called "higher-order theory"), self-consciousness requires a further

higher-order state representing the subject of the original representation in order to make such a subject finally conscious of itself. The basic intuition underlying the theory of reflection is elementary: if it is true that I become conscious of, say, a book I am reading by representing it in a completely analogous way through my senses, I can only become conscious of myself if I have a higher-order representation in which I represent myself either as the subject of a lower-order experience or as the subject of a lower-order cognitive or conative state.

In the sense of this long tradition, Oedipus only becomes self-conscious when his original ego-thought (2) causes him to have the higher-order representation (3) that identifies him as the subject and as the object of representation (2), as will be explained below:

3) I am the individual who is both the representing and the represented in (2).

The first-order representation (2) enables the subject to maintain the higher-order representation (3), in which it identifies itself both as the representing subject and as the represented subject/object. Only this meta-representation can explain the crucial difference between the accidental self-reference in (1) and (2) and the cognitive self-reference in (3).

The fundamental difficulty of the theories in question (the traditional theories of consciousness as reflection) and contemporary theories (the higher-order theories of consciousness) in explaining the phenomenon of self-consciousness can be expressed in terms of a simple and traditional dilemma: vicious circularity or regress ad infinitum. On the one hand, in order to know whether the representation/thought (2) is about himself, Oedipus would have to know the truth of the representation/thought (3). However, now the dilemma emerges: for this to happen, he would have to be able to think of the third-order representation:

4) I am the person who represents (3).

But in order to know (4), Oedipus would have to possess another representation of an even higher level:

5) I am the person who thinks (4).

Of course, regress cannot be stopped ad infinitum. This does not worry Rosenthal, who does not recognize the possibility of vicious regress because he assumes that higher-order representations, even if unconscious, are capable of making lower-order representations conscious (see Rosenthal, 2004, 164). However, following [Zahavi's critique \(2006\)](#), it seems puzzling to us (to say the least) how a representation that is not yet conscious can make another representation of a lower-order conscious that is equally unconscious.

On the other side of the dilemma, one could assume that the knowledge expressed by sentence (3) is already rooted in the original representation of Oedipus (2); however, since self-consciousness arises through "turning back on oneself" <Sich Zurückzusenden>, the assumption that the knowledge expressed in sentence (3) is already rooted in the original representation of Oedipus (2) presupposes, rather than explains, self-conscious self-reference. This is what Fichte calls a vicious circle (1937). Fichte was the first philosopher to see this as a threat to the traditional theory of self-consciousness. If self-consciousness can only arise through thinking returning to itself (higher-order

representation), as we see in (3), then self-conscious self-reference is presupposed rather than explained. He formulates his critique as follows:

We become conscious of the consciousness of our consciousness only by making the latter a second time into an object, thereby obtaining consciousness of our consciousness, and so ad infinitum. In this way, however, our consciousness is not explained, or there is consequently no consciousness at all if one assumes it to be a state of mind or an object and thus always presupposes a subject but never finds it. This sophistry lies at the heart of all systems, including the Kantian. (Fichte, *Nachlass*, 356, my translation)

Fichte's solution to the puzzle invokes what he calls "self-positing." But what does this mean? Unfortunately, Fichte never made it clear what he meant by "self-positing." As is usual in philosophy, there are always two possibilities. Firstly, perhaps he was never clear about his proposal. Secondly, perhaps his solution was just rhetorical. Be that as it may, the Fichtean formula "the 'I' posits itself" can only characterize Fichte's rejection of the traditional theory of reflection in a negative way. According to the Heidelberg School, "Sich-selbst-Stellens" certainly seems incomprehensible. If one follows this reading literally, Fichte seems to mean that the "I" exists through self-positing. But here is the point that Pothast raised in 1971: "How could one perform this act of self-presentation if it did not exist in the first place?" (Pothast, 1971, 71).

2. The Phenomenological Insight

The phenomenologists have proposed a solution to Fichte's paradox by suggesting an unintentional way of being acquainted with oneself. I would like to call this primary "Selbsterschlossenheit," in which "Dasein" does not yet consider itself as the object of its representation. Dasein is simply in the world ("in-der-Welt-sein"). Once again, with all due respect to the experts, this Dasein relates to the world in a non-representational and non-objectifying way (see Heidegger, 1982, 226).

Despite Heidegger's criticism of Husserl's alleged "inner theory of perception," Husserl (1973) was the first to tread this interesting path. Be that as it may, there is absolutely no doubt that Sartre (1976) was the first, after Husserl and Heidegger, to develop the concept of intransitive self-consciousness in continental philosophy. According to Sartre, only the necessity of the syntax of our neo-Latin languages forces us to say that we are conscious "of" our experiences or "of" ourselves. In his words:

Thus, reflection has no kind of primacy over the consciousness reflected on. It is not reflection that reveals the consciousness reflected in itself. Quite the contrary, the non-reflective consciousness makes the self-representation possible in the first place (Sartre, 1976, 19–20).

Sartre's phenomenological insight consists in the claim that intentional or transitive consciousness about the world presupposes an intransitive and non-intentional self-consciousness and vice versa. One becomes intransitively conscious of oneself when one begins to become aware of something other than oneself. According to Husserl, for example, "when I say 'I,' I grasp myself in a simple reflection. But this self-experience is (...) a mere directing myself towards something that was

already there for me" (Husserl, 1973, 492-93). And according to Sartre, "it is the non-reflective consciousness which renders the reflection possible" (1956, liii). To return to Fichte's conundrum: there is no danger of regress because "self-consciousness does not need reflective consciousness in order to become conscious of itself" (Sartre, 1956, 45).

Sartre first introduced the concept of prereflexive consciousness in his essay "The Transcendence of the Ego" (1956). In this early version of his theory of subjectivity, Sartre describes prereflexive consciousness as *impersonal*. In this framework, the ego is seen as a transcendent object that emerges from the field of impersonal consciousness. Gardner (2009) points out several philosophical problems with Sartre's view of 1956 and how Sartre overcame them in his *Being and Nothingness*. The most important problem is the explanation of the identity of the ego in prereflexive self-consciousness and the ego in the usual reflective consciousness (Gardner, 2009, 14). How can prereflexive consciousness be impersonal (under the assumption that reflective self-consciousness arises from prereflexive self-consciousness)?

We believe that Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "tacit cogito" resolves Sartre's original problem by distinguishing between the "tacit" or "silent" cogito, namely as "the presence of oneself to oneself" (Merleau-Ponty's, 2002, 470). Merleau-Ponty's distinction between the "tacit" and "spoken" cogito parallels Sartre's distinction between prereflexive and reflective self-consciousness (see, Merleau-Ponty's, 2002, 470-473). As Dillon claims: "Sartre's influence is manifest here. Merleau-Ponty's tacit cogito is modeled upon Sartre's prereflexive" (Merleau-Ponty's, 1997, 104-5). But whereas Sartre (1956) sees this prereflexive self-consciousness as impersonal, Merleau-Ponty conceives of this prereflexive self-consciousness as essentially embodied, embedded (in the sense that it finds itself in the world), and enactive (in the sense that it acts concretely in the world) (2002, 473), namely as a "living body." In other words, while Sartre conceives of the subject as not being its object, Merleau-Ponty, like Heidegger, conceives of it as a lived body, as the structure of *in-der-Welt-Sein* (*being-in-the-world*).

Since our present contribution does not fall within the scope of the history of contemporary philosophy, there is no room and no need to undertake an exegesis of the extensive contributions of the phenomenological tradition to this insight. We will, therefore, limit ourselves to systematically summarizing the features that we believe constitute the core of the insight:

a. Intrinsic Nature of Experience: Phenomenologists claim that prereflexive self-consciousness is an inherent and immediate aspect of all conscious experiences. This type of self-awareness does not necessitate reflection or a separate cognitive process. It is embedded in the experience itself, shaping what it feels like to have that experience.

b. Non-Objectifying Awareness: Prereflexive self-consciousness is non-objectifying, in contrast to reflective self-consciousness, which involves viewing the self as an object of thought. It is the tacit, lived experience of 'being' in the world. For instance, Sartre emphasizes that we are always minimally aware of ourselves as having experiences, even before any reflective thought occurs.

a. Pre-Conceptual Foundation: Phenomenologists argue that prereflexive self-consciousness serves as a pre-conceptual foundation for more complex, reflective forms of self-consciousness. It precedes and enables reflective self-awareness by providing the basic self-affective presence upon which cognitive self-reference can build.

b. Embodiment and World Orientation: Philosophers like Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the embodied nature of prereflexive self-awareness. Our engagement with the world is direct and embodied, reflecting our situational and intentional orientation toward the world, rather than through detached cognitive processes.

c. Experiential Validation: Phenomenologists often turn to the way we directly experience our own consciousness as evidence. The lived experience of being, without necessarily conceptualizing or turning oneself into an object, is seen as proof of the possibility and reality of prereflexive self-consciousness.

As we have seen, there are two main challenges with understanding prereflexive self-consciousness in its current form. Firstly, when its description is clear, it tends to be framed in negative terms. However, when we try to describe it positively, the language used is vague and metaphorical. As a result, we seem to understand what prereflexive or intransitive self-consciousness is not, but we do not have a clear idea of what it actually is.

3. Self-reference Without Self-identification

To the best of our knowledge, [Zahavi \(2006, 280\)](#) is the only contemporary author within the phenomenological tradition who has attempted to describe the phenomenon of prereflexive self-consciousness positively. He employs a semantic tool from the Anglo-Saxon analytic tradition, specifically [Shoemaker's \(1968\)](#) semantic concept of immunity to error through misidentification in the use of the first-person pronoun as the subject. In Zahavi's own words:

Rather, my pre-reflective access to myself in first-personal experience is immediate, non-observational, and non-objectifying. It involves what has more recently been called "self-reference without identification" ([Shoemaker, 2006, 280](#))

But what is 'self-reference without self-identification?' [Shoemaker's \(1968\)](#) semantic concept has a rich history, beginning with Wittgenstein's *Blue Book* (1958). Wittgenstein was the first to distinguish two types of 'I'-sentences. He described the first type as those in which the pronoun 'I' is used *as an object*, such as in the sentence: 'I have grown six inches.' The second type involves using 'I' *as a subject*, exemplified by sentences like: 'I have a toothache.' What distinguishes the use of the first-person pronoun *as a subject* from its use *as an object* is the impossibility of making a peculiar kind of error called an identification mistake. But what is this kind of mistake?

When using a simple predicate sentence, such as 'Peter has grown six inches,' we are typically vulnerable to two types of errors. First, we might wrongly attribute a predicate to an object we have correctly identified: Peter has not grown six inches but, let us assume, only four inches. This is known as a predicate mistake. There is also a second type of error. Suppose we correctly believe that someone has grown six inches; however, the person is not Peter. We have mistaken Peter for

someone else, leading to what we call an identification mistake. Wittgenstein's point is this: while the use of 'I' as an object involves the identification of a particular person (who has grown six inches?) and is thus subject to identification errors, the use of 'I' as a subject, as in 'I have a toothache,' is immune to this type of mistake. This is because there is no act of reference, only a verbal articulation of a personal experience (Wittgenstein, 1958).

Shoemaker (1968) adopted Wittgenstein's distinction but challenged his view by arguing that the first-person pronoun does indeed refer to when used as a subject, although in a different manner than when used as an object. Shoemaker explains Wittgenstein's distinction in this way: when the first-person pronoun is used as an object, the subject self-ascribes a *non-psychological predicate*, such as 'have grown six inches,' leaving open the question of who the subject is to which the predicate applies. Conversely, when the pronoun is used as a subject, the subject self-ascribes a *psychological predicate*, such as 'have a toothache,' rendering identification unnecessary. In contexts where identification is unnecessary, there is no possibility of misidentification or identification failure.

However, as Evans (1982) convincingly demonstrated, immunity to error through misidentification concerning 'I' is not confined to psychological first-person sentences. In doing so, Evans provides the first accurate explanation of this phenomenon. Consider the 'I'-sentence, 'My legs are crossed.' If the subject knows that someone's legs are crossed, he cannot reasonably question whether the crossed legs are his own or someone else's. This immediate knowledge does not depend on a specific type of self-ascribed predicate, such as psychological predicates, but rather on 'a judgment based on a peculiar method' (Evans, 1982, 196). What does this mean exactly? When the source of information is, for example, a proprioceptive channel, as with the statement 'My legs are crossed,' there is no need for identification because the source of information is the same as the reference.

Zahavi's interpretation relies heavily on comparing Sartre's concept of intransitive self-consciousness as non-observational and non-objectifying with the Anglophone analytical tradition's conceptualization of self-reference without identification as subjective—specifically, the use of the pronoun 'I' as a subject as opposed to its use as an object. However, there are at least three reasons that argue against Zahavi's reading.

First, as Zahavi acknowledges, the phenomenological tradition regards the most primitive form of self-consciousness as intransitive, meaning non-intentional. Here, the subject does not consider themselves as the object of their representation. Where there is no reference, self-reference cannot exist; consequently, self-reference without identification is impossible. Moreover, there is no textual evidence suggesting that Husserl, Sartre, Heidegger, or Merleau-Ponty include the self as a subject in first-person 'de se' content. In other words, the phenomenological tradition is not concerned with what Shoemaker and others have called self-reference without self-identification because, in prereflexive self-consciousness, there is no self-reference in the first place.

Second, Shoemaker's semantic conception of self-reference without identification through the use of the pronoun 'I' is not a solution to Fichte's puzzle arising from the theory of reflection. Shoemaker suggests that the use of the pronoun 'I' allows individuals to refer to themselves without

the need for a further act of identification. This approach can avoid the problematic infinite regress typical of theories of reflection, in which the subject constantly refers back to itself in an endless regress. However, this proposal does not adequately address Fichte's puzzle. Fichte argued that any act of self-reference presupposes prior knowledge of oneself as the subject performing that act. Fichte would reply that we are back at the second horn of his dilemma, the vicious circle: through Shoemaker's semantic conception of self-reference without identification, self-consciousness is presupposed rather than explained.

Finally, I would like to add that Shoemaker's semantic conception of self-reference without self-identification does not adequately reflect the essential features of phenomenological insight, as described above. First, Shoemaker's notion does not reflect the phenomenological insight that intransitive self-consciousness is primitive and ubiquitous in most of our experiences and our cognitive and conative states. On the contrary, for Shoemaker and Wittgenstein, self-reference without self-identification is only the limiting case in which the use of the first-person pronoun as subject dispenses with identification. Second, Shoemaker's self-reference without self-identification does not fulfill the phenomenological assumption that intransitive self-consciousness is a prerequisite for transitive self-consciousness, I-thought, or for the simple form of intentional consciousness of the world.

4. The Adverbial Account

Any halfway plausible explanation of phenomenological insight must take into account the seemingly paradoxical features of the central idea. The first puzzle is this: primitive self-consciousness is related to the subject, but since it is intransitive, it is not an intentional relation of the subject to itself. The second puzzle is the following: since the subject is neither perceived nor thought, intransitive self-consciousness is neither a form of cognition nor a perception of itself.

Here, we propose the following analogy. In the contemporary philosophy of perception, the rejection of the traditional theory of sensory data as intentional objects standing in for everyday objects has led to a non-intentional view of perceptual experience, known in the literature as "adverbialism." Adverbialism aims to do away with the traditional act-object structure as a model for sensory experience. Instead of an intentional relation to sense data, we have an adverbial characterization of the form or manner in which one experiences something. Thus, seeing red is not an intentional relation between the subject's perception and something else (a sensory datum) that embodies the property of being red. Some philosophers ([Ducasse, 1942](#); [Chisholm, 1957](#)) in the mid-twentieth century suggested that sentences such as "X sees a red and triangular sensory datum" might be better understood as "X sees an object in a red and triangular manner."

But as we have seen, intransitive self-consciousness differs from cognition and perception in that the subject is not perceived or thought of as an object. According to adverbialism, adverbs modify perception precisely by excluding certain cognitive or perceptual processes. On this basis, we propose to explain phenomenological insight by comparing it with the old, traditional adverbial theory of perception. Intransitive self-consciousness can be seen as an adverbial modification of the way that

any experience represents something, i.e., as the way that the subject entertains this content in a first-person manner. It functions as an operator that precedes any *subjectless* content. If "p" represents a subjectless content of any sensory experience or propositional attitude that the subject undergoes regardless of whether the subject self-refers, we have the following:

6) I am *self-consciously thinking/perceiving* that p.

My point is that (6) stands in opposition to the thought (7) below:

7) I know *that I am thinking/perceiving* that p.

In the transitive form (7), self-consciousness functions as an intentional relation between me and my thinking (which could also apply to perceiving). In contrast, in the intransitive form (6), self-consciousness *modifies the way* I think. The adverb "self-consciously" describes the way I think in the first-person content that p. This means that there are no additional mental states involved in (6) as there are in (7), where thinking of p and higher-order thinking about thinking of p occur. There is no additional act of self-consciousness after the thought that p; rather, "self-conscious" describes how the thought of p occurs.

5. Self-Involvement without Self-reference

In the previous section, we saw that the subjectless content p is conceived in a self-conscious or first-person way. The question is what this adverbial way of entertaining the subjectless content p implies. To explain our alternative account, we would like to refer to Perry's famous thought experiment from 1986 about an imaginary tribe called Z-landers. These people live in complete isolation and have never left their homeland. When Z-people give weather reports, such as "it is raining," the correct content terms refer to Z-land, where the Z-people's weather report is given. However, since Z-land is an argument role that never changes, Z residents do not have to specify their land. Z-land is what Perry calls an "unarticulated constituent" of the content "It is raining," i.e., a constituent of the content that is neither verbally articulated nor mentally represented.

Perry's claim that Z-land is an unarticulated component of the content of Z-land weather reports is controversial. Perry justifies his claim by arguing that without assuming that Z-land is an unarticulated constituent of the content, the content of the thought would otherwise be incomplete since it is a sentence that expresses a proposition without a definite truth value. But this last argument is also questionable. In Kaplan's semantics, a sentence is true in its context of use if the proposition expressed by the sentence in this context is true under the default evaluative circumstances determined by c. The standard evaluative circumstances are pairs of a world and a time so that the proposition p is true for a given circumstance if the proposition is true in the world and time of that circumstance. Suppose we are not afraid of incomplete content. In that case, nothing prevents us from considering Z-land as an aspect of the circumstance under which we evaluate the placeless content of the reports of Z-landers rather than as an unarticulated constituent of the content.

Contrary to Perry's account, we see no compelling reason against considering "the argument role that never changes" as an aspect of evaluating an incomplete, relative, and placeless proposition. A straightforward argument against Perry's idea is this: assuming that Z-land is "the argument role that

never changes," why must we consider it an unarticulated content constituent? If Z-land is everywhere and nowhere, it seems unlikely that the inhabitants of Z-land have a concept of Z-land. Moreover, if Z-land is somewhere that Z-landers cannot perceive, they cannot even represent Z-land nonconceptually. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Z-landers do not refer to Z-land, even implicitly, in their propositional exchange about the weather in Z-land.

Perry's other examples support our argument. Although time zones are a crucial factor in any account of time, they were not considered before the discovery of new continents. People never implicitly labeled time zones as "unarticulated constituents" of their time reports because they had no concept of them. The simplest explanation for the Z-landers' weather report is the assumption that the Z-land concept is an aspect of a broader evaluative circumstance rather than an unarticulated constituent of the placeless content itself.

Let us now assume that anthropologists find Z-land. As usual, gifts are exchanged, and the Z-dwellers receive phones to communicate with their new acquaintances outside of Z-land. Now, things change dramatically. When the Z-dwellers communicate weather conditions in Z-land to the anthropologists outside of Z-land, they have to refer to Z-land. Be that as it may, we see no reason why the new reference to Z-land needs to be verbally or mentally articulated, such as "It's raining in Z-land." The reference to Z-land in the new reports can also be implicit: "It's raining."

Perry's famous essay on Z-land fails to mention two crucial points. First, Z-landers must understand the concept of Z-land in order to refer to Z-land in their weather reports. Without this understanding, they cannot talk about their land since Z-land is everywhere and not an object of perception. It is different from referring to properties and land. Z-land cannot be perceived and, therefore, cannot be referred to as an object without the concept of Z-land. It is present everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Therefore, references to it are based only on concepts. Secondly, it is assumed that Z-dwellers now refer to Z-land because it is the best explanation for their behavior in communicating with people outside Z-land. It reflects their worldview.

Let us now assume that the anthropologists find Z-land. Again, as usual, gifts are exchanged, and the Z-dwellers receive phones to communicate with their new acquaintances outside of Z-land. Now, things change. When they communicate weather conditions to the anthropologists outside of Z-land, they have to refer to Z-land. We see no reason why the new reference to Z-land needs to be verbally or mentally articulated, such as "It is raining in Z-land." The reference to Z-land in the new reports can also be implicit: "It is raining."

Here is our proposal. The representational content of experience is subjectless because it does not refer to the subject. Nevertheless, the adverbial first-person form of entertaining the subjectless content establishes the subject as the decisive parameter of the broad circumstances in relation to which the representational content is to be evaluated: a scenario (in Chalmers's sense) or a world centered on the subject and the time and space in which the experience takes place. We refer to this view as "intransitive self-involvement without self-reference."

As with the Z-landers, however, things change when the Z-dwellers begin to share their overall experience with another person who has a different perspective. Suppose someone asks, "My dear, I

am without my glasses. Do you see a cat in that tree over there?" Now, the person concerned cannot help but implicitly or explicitly refer to their point of view in their answer to the person's question: "Yes, I see a cat over there." In view of this communicative dynamic, the subject, which was previously only involved as a concerned subject, for which there is such a thing as "being in a certain state," now also becomes an essential part of the *de se* content.

6. Self-involvement as Self-embodiment

Let us return to Evans's example. Consider a person saying or thinking, 'I have my legs crossed.' Here, there is immunity to error through misidentification because the source of information and the reference are identical. Now, imagine that the person with the proprioceptive experience does not form the *de se* thought, 'I have my legs crossed.' Instead, they merely experience their legs as crossed. This can happen with a small child who has not yet acquired language and does not feel the need to communicate their experience to a caregiver, thus lacking self-referential thought. The toddler's situation is comparable to inhabitants of a hypothetical community (Z-land) isolated from the rest of humanity, who might not need or have the context for external communication of such experiences, even about simple matters like weather conditions. If we were to express their proprioceptive experience of having crossed legs verbally, it would take the form of a propositional function such as 'x has their legs crossed,' where 'x' is a free, not a bound, variable.

8) (Self-consciously) X has legs crossed.

The sentential operator ('self-consciously') indicates that the toddler belongs to the broader context of evaluation (i.e., a centered scenario) of the incomplete content represented by the propositional function: 'X has its legs crossed.' This operator indicates that to derive a true or false proposition, we need to replace the free variable 'X' with the individual who is thinking the thought—in this case, the toddler.

What phenomenologists call 'sensory experience' is not confined to information acquired through 'internal' channels like embodied proprioception, kinesthesia, or body sensation. It also encompasses 'exteroception' or perceptions: visual, olfactory, tactile, auditory, and gustatory. Nonetheless, this does not alter the fundamental account. When I listen to Bach's Mass in B Minor, I do not represent myself as the subject of the listening experience. I am not self-representing because there is no necessity to do so: I am neither communicating my experience to someone else nor wondering whether I am listening to Bach's B Minor Mass or something else. Regardless, phenomenologists maintain that I am listening to Bach's B Minor Mass in the first person, a concept they metaphorically refer to as 'mineness.' Thus, according to our proposal, we maintain the same account as before:

9) (Self-consciously) X listens to Bach.

Our account must address what [Schear](#) calls the 'interview argument' (2009, 14). For instance, consider someone interrupting me while I am listening to Bach's Mass and asking, 'What are you doing?' I can readily respond, 'I was listening to Bach.' According to Zahavi, this suggests

that I was aware of myself while listening, even if I was not explicitly representing myself. However, Schear raises his 'refrigerator light' objection to Zahavi's view: Just because I can promptly answer a question about what I was doing does not imply that I was self-aware throughout the entire listening experience. Similarly, the fact that the refrigerator light is always on when its door is opened does not mean it is always on (even when its door is closed). Therefore, my ability to answer the question 'What are you doing?' in a straightforward way does not necessarily indicate continuous self-awareness.

Zahavi's view corresponds to Perry's original notion of the 'unarticulated content' of experience or cognition. Z-dwellers always represent their land (Z-land) as the place where it rains. In their weather reports, however, they do not need to articulate this mentally or verbally because Z-land was a parameter that never changed, at least until Z-inhabitants came into contact with foreigners. *Mutatis mutandis*, when I am listening to Bach's Mass in B minor, I am continuously representing myself as the subject having this experience. However, I have no need to articulate myself mentally or verbally in the content of my experience, since I am a fixed parameter that never changes in all my experiences.

We think Schear has a point. The idea of a 'tacit' or 'implicit' self-consciousness is trickier. If, according to the phenomenological insight, prereflexive or intransitive self-consciousness is not a representation or reflection on itself, if it is 'non-objectifying,' then even assuming that the subject is omnipresent in all its experiences, its place cannot be in the content of its listening experience but in the broad circumstance of evaluating the rather subjectless incomplete content that sentence (9) expresses. Therefore, when I am asked what I am doing, and I readily answer that I am listening to Bach, the subject moves from the broad circumstance of evaluation of the incomplete content of (9) to the content itself:

10) I (know) that I am listening to Bach.

What can we conclude from this? We suggest that the sentential operator ('self-consciously') modifying a relativistic content best explains Zahavi's metaphor of a 'subtle background presence' (Zahavi, 2006, 124).

Conclusion

In this conclusion, we would like to express my concluding remarks on all the previous sections of this paper and draw important conclusions from them. Let us go!

- A. The phenomenological insight. As we have argued, there is much intuitive appeal that we are self-consciousness prior to reflexive or full-fledged self-consciousness, but not, as the phenomenological tradition rightly claims, not as representing ourselves, as we normally do when we need to communicate our I-thoughts to others. This is what the phenomenological tradition calls "prereflexive" forms of primitive self-consciousness (Merleau-Ponty's living body). The claim is clear: before any self-reflection, or even before any form of I-thought, we are already "acquaintance" with ourselves in such an intransitive

way. As we emphasized from the beginning, this intuition seems so persistent to us that we cannot even imagine how one could reject it!

- B. The phenomenological insight can put an end to the long-standing Heidelberg dispute about how to solve the traditional Fichtean paradox of self-consciousness: How could I become conscious of myself through reflection if I, as a reflecting subject who represents myself as a reflected subject as an object, must first be aware that I am the individual who performs the act of reflection myself? The solution to the problem is obvious: I have always been acquainted with myself long before I started reflecting on myself and using the token-reflexive rule of the first-person pronoun to refer to myself consciously.
- C. The problem that motivates this work, however, is the following. The phenomenologists of the old tradition and also the contemporary neo-phenomenologists rely too much on metaphors or vague expressions such as "sense of ownership;" "mineness," "sense of self," and so on. This gives rise to the suspicion that "too much ado about nothing."
- D. So, we aimed to "unpack" these metaphors! My first proposal was to read intransitive self-consciousness as an adverb, following a lost tradition in the philosophy of perception: "adverbialism." Given the serious metaphysical and epistemological problems posed by the old sense-data theory of perception, they propose an alternative explanation for perception: Instead of a sense-data such as quasi red circle, we see something in a way that is "red-like" and that is "circle-like."
- E. By analogy, we have suggested
- F. ed that intransitive self-consciousness is *the way you experience or think* about something else *in the first person*. You can be self-conscious *about thinking* that tomatoes are red (transitive self-consciousness), but you can also self-consciously think that tomatoes are red (intransitive self-consciousness).
- G. We have tried to explain the main difference in terms of the Perry/Recanati semantic framework. If you are a Z-dweller who is isolated from the outside world, and you say or think to yourself, "It is raining," then you do not care about Z-land (an argument role that never changes) because, for you, there are no other places. Therefore, Z-land is not even an "unarticulated constituent" of the proposition expressed by the sentence "It is raining!" as Perry originally claimed in 1986. However, if you met other people outside of Z-land and had to tell them that it was raining because they wanted to land their plane in Z-land, you would say, "Watch out, it is raining in Z-land."
- H. Thus, we come to the crucial distinction between the two pairs of sentences:
 - 8) It is raining!
 - 9) It is raining in Z-land!
 - 6) I am *self-consciously thinking/seeing* that it is raining.
 - 7) I know that I *am thinking/seeing* that it is raining.

But what is the big difference between the two? As I have claimed, in 8) "Z-land" and in 6) "the subject" are not constituents of the content. Why is this so? As we have argued, there is no need

for their representation in thought, let alone in language. However, as adverbs modify the sentences in question, both adverbs determine the circumstances under which the proposition expressed by the sentence in question is to be evaluated.

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