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Self Awareness and the Self-Presenting Character of Abnormal Conscious Experience

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Abstract: *Some philosophers suggest that a minimal form of self-awareness is an integral element of the way in which all experiences are given (SPC: self-presenting claim). The main argument for this is that the phenomenological quality of ‘mineness’ of the experience reveals the self as a part of all experiences. Since the sense of mineness is taken as intrinsic to the givenness of the experience, it counts as an argument for the SPC. In this essay, I assess this claim and its main argument. After describing the phenomenological approach to self-awareness that grounds the discussion, I comment on some pathological cases that challenge the SPC. After this, I examine the standard reply in defence of the SPC and I focus the discussion on cases of thought insertion. I conclude that although the standard reply adds interesting elements to the general discussion, it becomes philosophically problematic especially when it tries to deal with cases of thought insertion.*

Keywords: Self-Awareness, Phenomenal Consciousness, Thought Insertion, Self-Presenting Claim, Phenomenological Approach to Self-awareness, Zahavi

Introduction

Some psychiatrists and philosophers have claimed that conscious experience has a ‘self-presenting’ character. This self-presenting claim can be stated as follows:

SPC: A minimal form of self-awareness is always given as an integral element of the intrinsic intentional structure of all experiences. Phenomenal consciousness always involves self-awareness.

One of the main arguments for the SPC is that the phenomenological quality of ‘being mine’ of the experience reveals the subject of that experience as an integral part of its givenness (Zahavi & Parnas 1998; Zahavi 2005; Gallagher 2012)¹. Since the sense of mineness is taken as a constant feature of this givenness, it counts as an

argument for the SPC. In this context, no experience lacks the sense of mineness and all experiences are self-presenting. In this chapter, I shall assess these ideas. After providing some background for the discussion, I discuss some pathological cases that challenge the SPC. I then examine the standard defence of the SPC and I focus the discussion on cases of thought insertion. I conclude that although the reply adds interesting elements to the discussion, it is philosophically problematic and, for this reason, the main argument for the SPC is not compelling.

Zahavi's Phenomenological Approach to Self-Awareness

Dan Zahavi has become one of the main defenders of the SPC. He suggests that to have a conscious experience of, let's say, X is also to have a degree of awareness of one's self as the subject experiencing X (Zahavi & Parnas 1998, 691; Zahavi 2005, Chapter 5). For instance, while listening to a song, I am also aware that I am the one listening to that song. This does not seem controversial. However, Zahavi adds:

"The 'I', the subject of self-awareness is simply a feature of the givenness of the experiencer" (Zahavi 2002, 697)².

Here, Zahavi suggests that the subject of the experience is integral to the way in which experience are subjectively given, i.e. the subject of the experience is an inherent and primitive element of the experiential stream and its natural appearance (Zahavi 2000; 2012)³. Zahavi suggests that one arrives at this conception of self-awareness simply by inspecting the structure of conscious experiences (Zahavi 2005, Chapter 1). Quite interestingly, according to Zahavi, this primitive self-awareness is 'pre-reflective', i.e. prior to any reflection on the experience and existing as a 'background presence' in the givenness of all experiences (Zahavi 2005, 115-146; Gallagher 2012, 127-130). This pre-reflective self-awareness constitutes the foundation for any type of reflective self-awareness (Gallagher and Zahavi 2010, 4). In this context, Zahavi seems to use the term 'pre-reflective' to describe a type of 'unattended' awareness of one's self that is part of the structure of the way in which experience appears to us. At least, this is the impression he gives when – following Husserl – he states that:

"Self-consciousness, rather than being something that occurs during exceptional circumstances, namely whenever we pay attention to our conscious life, is a feature characterizing subjectivity as such, no matter what worldly entities it might otherwise be conscious of and occupied with" (Zahavi 2005, 11)⁴.

In his work, Zahavi does not deny the existence of a 'higher order' self-awareness. However, he suggests that the pre-reflective type is a necessary condition for any other type of higher order self-awareness that Zahavi calls 'reflective self-awareness'. Let's contrast these two types of self-awareness:

(a) On the one hand, the so-called 'reflective self-awareness' is the product of directing our attention to the structure of our own occurrent mental states. This would imply a certain degree of cognitive and representational processing (Zahavi 2005). However, according to Zahavi, this takes us away from the most fundamental nature of self-awareness, namely, its pre-reflective givenness. Zahavi seems to understand the term 'reflective' in a Lockean sense i.e. as the mind's ability to turn its gaze inward upon itself (self-directedness), becoming the object of its contemplation (Locke 1975, 107). As a result of directing our attention to a certain mental state, we can reflectively be aware that we are in that mental state. An example of this type of self-awareness would be the so-called 'narrative self-awareness' (Gallagher 2000; Zahavi 2007).

(b) On the other hand, the 'pre-reflective' type is understood as an 'unattended' awareness of one's self that is 'always present' as an element of the common way in which experiences are given before directing our attention to them. Zahavi understands this type of self-awareness as part of the givenness of experience. The term 'pre-reflective' takes two meanings in this context: '(1) it is an [unattended] awareness we have before we do any reflecting on our experience; (2) it is an implicit and first-order awareness rather than an explicit or higher-order form of self-consciousness' (Zahavi & Gallagher 2010, 1). According to Zahavi, we do not need to do any reflection on the structure of experience in order to be pre-reflectively aware that we are the ones undergoing our experiences. Zahavi claims that the 'reflective self-awareness' just thematizes an awareness that belongs to the very same structure in which experience intentionally is, and hence: "an explicit reflective self-consciousness is possible only because there is a pre-reflective self-awareness that is an ongoing and more primary self-consciousness [...]" (Ibid). Finally, Zahavi states the relation between reflective and pre-reflective self-awareness as follows: "Rather, the point is that this reflective self-awareness is derivative, and that it always presupposes the existence of a prior unthematic, non-objectifying, pre-reflective self-awareness as its condition of possibility" (Zahavi 2002, 17).

Some philosophers will deny the notion of 'pre-reflective self-awareness' (see Metzinger 2003; Rosenthal 1997). But we might all agree that for any conscious experience it is possible to reflect on it and to become aware of it as our own experience. However, this is not what Zahavi has in mind. Zahavi's claim is more controversial; he suggests that the reason why this is true is because of the existence of a pre-reflective self-awareness that is part of the structure of the givenness of the experience. However, it is reasonable to say that this idea requires further considerations. For instance, Thomas Metzinger (2003) does not deny the existence of a reflective self-awareness when we reflect on our experiences. However, he says

that this self-awareness has nothing to do with pre-reflective preconditions since it is an illusion created by a self-system. The main idea is that experience itself does not have a self-presenting structure and therefore, we cannot attribute to it any type of self-awareness as integral to its givenness. Let's now examine Zahavi's main argument for his claim.

Self-Awareness and Sense of Mineness

Zahavi proposes that in order to be reflectively aware of ourselves, we need to be familiarized with ourselves in a more fundamental way, namely, with our own ongoing experiencing. In Zahavi's view, the SPC is revealed through the analysis of the concept of pre-reflective self-awareness. According to Zahavi, the way in which experiences are given contains certain basic phenomenological features. These features are 'pre-reflective' in the sense that they are prior to any reflection on the experience, and the most important of which is the so-called 'sense of mineness'. This will be Zahavi's main argument for the SPC.

Zahavi (2005) suggests that the different modes of givenness of the experience (imaginative, perceptual, cognitive, etc.) share a common feature. All of them are marked as seeming to be my experiences; all of them have a 'sense of ownership or mineness'. Gallagher & Zahavi (2010) claim that: "the experience [always] happens in an immediate way and it is implicitly marked as my experienter" (Gallagher & Zahavi 2010,1)⁵. Zahavi writes:

"Thus, whenever I experience something, my self [...] is present and is, so to speak, therefore implicated. The experiences do not simply pass me by, as if they were foreign entities, but rather they are exactly mine" (Zahavi 2005, 81).

Zahavi claims that the sense of mineness is intrinsic to all experiences in the sense that: 'whether a certain experience is experienced as mine or not, however, depends not on something apart from the experience, but precisely on the givenness of the experience' (Ibid, 124). Importantly, Zahavi suggests that the sense of mineness of the experiences captures an immediate and non-observational access to oneself. Since this property is pre-reflective and reveals the self as a part of the structure of any experience, the sense of mineness is taken as an argument to say that conscious experience is self-presenting.

In sum, the sense of mineness is taken as intrinsic to the structure of the givenness of all experience (all experiences are given as mine) and it needs to be taken as an argument for the claim that suggests that a minimal self-awareness is revealed as a structural constant of the givenness of experience. This is because the sense of mineness presents the experiences as being mine, i.e. presenting me as the subject of those experiences.

Disrupted Sense of Mineness and the SPT

It is hard to imagine what abnormal mental phenomena feel like. However, it is widely agreed that abnormal experiences constitute a valuable contribution to understating the most essential features of phenomenal consciousness and self-awareness (Parnas & Zahavi 2003). These reports have been taken as a plausible way of testing theories in phenomenology, philosophy of mind, neuroscience and cognitive science (Gallagher 2000; Parnas & Zahavi 2000; Metzinger 2003, 439). Conversely, a theory which fails to accommodate pathological cases may be problematic.

In the context of our discussion, pathological cases confront us with situations that challenge the argument from the sense of mineness. Since our discussion of the SPC concerns the way in which experiences are given to us, it is extremely important to pay careful attention to the phenomenology of these cases in order to raise plausible conclusions on this debate. In this section, I shall examine the claim that no experience lacks the 'sense of ownership' that underlies the SPC. There seem to exist an important number of empirical cases that suggest that it is possible to have experiences with no sense of mineness and therefore, that the argument from the sense of mineness is false. The most challenging cases come from people suffering from thought insertion in schizophrenia. For this reason, let me start with the weaker cases to finally focus our discussion on cases of disrupted experiences of thinking.

Disrupted Bodily awareness

Bodily awareness denotes a certain type of experience that presents our body from the first person perspective, including proprioception, kinaesthetic experiences, bodily sensations and the sense of balance (Martin 1995). Usually, we experience a sense of mineness with respect to the experience of a body part, i.e. in normal cases the experience of our body part is marked as mine. However, there are cases in which this condition is not met, which suggests that this property would not be constant in the givenness of experience, contrary to Zahavi's proposal. For instance, people suffering from somatoparaphrenic delusion deny the sense of mineness of the experience of a certain body part. With the lack of this experiential property, patients attribute the ownership to someone else or they personify it. In these cases, patients receive sensory stimulation from the alien body part; however, the experience of that body part lacks the sense of mineness, i.e. the experience of the alien limb is not marked as their own. Phenomenologically, patients suffering from this delusion experience some body part as not theirs. We might suggest that the lack of the experiential quality of mineness plus a delusional general state makes the patient claim that the owner of that certain body part is someone other than the patient. A similar case – and perhaps clearer – is given by the alien hand syndrome

in which patients although feeling the sensational properties of a body part, do not experience the body part as their own⁶. Patients suffering from this condition deny the sense of ownership for the experience of a body part.

These cases give us *prima facie* evidence to suppose that at the phenomenological level, the sense of mineness can be somehow dissociated from a certain type of experience. This last distinction is important because Zahavi seems build his whole account specifically at the phenomenological level. If we take the reports of these patients at face value, we might suggest that: ‘such people experience bodily sensation in a limb that they do not experience as their own. That is, they possess bodily-awareness without a sense of ownership’ (Smith 2013, 10). Although these patients have sensorial inputs, these inputs do not imply the patients having the experience of the body part with a sense of mineness.

Disrupted Action Awareness

In normal cases, we feel a sense of mineness attached to our conscious actions. Usually, from the first person perspective, the awareness of an action reveals the action as mine. However, there are cases in which this experience is disrupted. Biran et al present the following case:

“JC [56-year-old right-handed man] attributed wishes and plans to his right limb. These attributions were evident in statements such as “It has a mind of its own”, “Wants to be the boss”, “Its own way”, “Wants to dust the way it wants”, “It won’t go the way I want”, “Controls the towel while I dry myself”.” (Biran et al 2006, 567)

In the so-called anarchic hand syndrome, patients are aware of their actions but they do not have the experience of those actions as their own (Marchetti & Della Sala 1998). In these cases, patients receive sensory information given by the movements of the hand; however, the experience of that movement is not phenomenologically given as ‘their’ experience. From these cases we can raise a similar conclusion to the one offered in the last section. If we take the patients’ reports at face value, we can suggest that they experience action awareness with no sense of ownership (Devignemont 2007).

Disrupted Experience of Conscious Thinking

The phenomenon called ‘thought Insertion’ – TI henceforth – is widely recognized as one of the most significant symptoms of schizophrenia (first-rank symptoms; Mellor 1970)⁷. As a matter of fact, TI on its own is enough for a diagnosis of schizophrenia (F20, ICD-10; World Health Organization 1992). Smith (2013) refers to these cases as a disruption of the sense of ownership of intellectual experience i.e. ‘the experience of consciously thinking’. Smith suggests that:

[In normal situations] when I think through a problem I am aware of the problem itself, but it is also manifest to me that it is me that is thinking about it. That is, there is a sense of ownership over my episodes of conscious thinking (Smith 2013, 11)

In contrast with normal cases, in TI, subject experiences thoughts which are not his own intruding into his mind (Mullins & Spence 2003). As Sims writes:

“[In TI, a patient] experiences thoughts that do not have the feeling of familiarity, of being his own, but he feels that they have been put in his mind without his volition, from outside himself” (Sims 2003, 168)

In these cases, patients do not experience a sense of mineness attached to the episode of conscious thinking. In TI, the ‘conscious thinking’ is not given as having the phenomenal property of mineness (Metzinger 2003). Quite often, patients suggest that the real owner has inserted the thought into their minds (Mellor 1970). The following reports are instances of TI:

“I have never read nor heard them; they come unasked; I do not dare to think I am the source but I am happy to know of them without thinking them. They come at any moment like a gift and I do not dare to impart them as if they were my own.”
(Jaspers 1963, 123)

“I look out of the window and I think the garden looks nice and the grass looks cool. But the thoughts of Eammon Andrews come to my mind. There are no other thoughts there, only his. He treats my mind like a screen and flashes his thoughts onto it like you flash a picture”
(Mellor 1970, 17)

“Thoughts are put into my mind like ‘Kill God’. It’s just like my mind working, but it isn’t. They come from this chap, Chris. They’re his thoughts.”
(Frith 1992, 66)

“Sometimes it seemed to be her own thought ‘(...)but I don’t get the feeling that it is.’ She said her ‘own thought might say the same thing (...)But the feeling it isn’t the same . . . the feeling is that it is somebody else’s (...)”
(Hoerl 2001, 190)

“I didn’t hear these words as literal sounds, as though the houses were talking and I were hearing them; instead, the words just came into my head—they were ideas I was having. Yet I instinctively knew they were not my ideas. They belonged to the houses, and the houses had put them in my head”
(Saks 2007, 29)

Taking the patients' reports at face value, we can *prima facie* suggest that patients suffering from TI do not experience their thoughts as their own and therefore, from the first person perspective, they seem to lack a sense of mineness attached to intellectual experience⁸. In light of this, there are good reasons to think that the described cases provide plausible evidence to suppose that the 'givenness' of some experiences is not accompanied by a sense of mineness (as the SPC presupposes). We do not deny that there is 'something it is like' to be in the described states. It is quite natural and plausible to suggest that there is something it is like to experience an anarchic hand episode or an inserted thought that is qualitatively different from experiencing a full owned action or a full owned thought. However, the described cases show that the phenomenological sense of mineness can be dissociated from certain experiential modalities and therefore, this show that this property would not be integral to the 'givenness' of experience, as Zahavi proposes.

The described cases show a disassociation between the metaphysics and the phenomenology of experience. The hand that a patient suffering from somatoparaphrenic delusion is aware of is necessarily the patient's hand, however, the experience of it is not given as having a sense of mineness. The hand is not experienced as the patient's hand. There seems to be a dissociation that occurs at the phenomenological level. Hence, taking at face value the reports, we cannot be completely sure that all experiences reveal a minimal pre-reflective form of self-awareness (minimal self) as a constant structural element (SPC). This is because, on Zahavi's view, the presence of a sense of mineness associated to each token experience is a condition for the self to be revealed in the experience. As we have seen to some patients certain experiences are not phenomenologically given as their own.

Similar interpretations of these cases are found in different authors. For instance, Metzinger (2003) has suggested that cases of TI present patients alienated from their own thoughts for which they experience no sense of ownership or agency⁹. Explicitly referring to Zahavi's view, Metzinger (2006) proposes that these types of cases demonstrate that the sense of mineness is not 'an invariant dimension of the first-personal givenness' as Zahavi claims (cf. Zahavi 2005, 143). In cases of thought insertion, patients might have introspective access to their own mental states, but still experience these states not only as being influenced or controlled by someone else, but as alien, as belonging to another. In line with this, Smith (2013) concludes from the revision of similar pathological cases that: 'it seems reasonable to say that, in some sense at least, people can become alienated from their own bodily experience, action, memory and conscious thought' (Smith 2013, 12). Based on this, he concludes that some pathological cases support the claim that some experiences can lack a sense of ownership. In conclusion, it seems plausible to say that it is

possible to have experiences with no sense of mineness attached to them, for this reason the main argument for the SPT is not compelling.

Are cases of ‘disrupted sense of mineness’ an argument against the argument from the sense of mineness? Zahavi’s Reply

Zahavi (2005) is well aware of the existence of pathological cases that challenge the argument from the sense of mineness. In this section I shall examine some of the main aspects of the reply offered by Zahavi and the problems that each aspect faces when it tries to deal with cases of disrupted episodes of conscious thinking.

Zahavi claims that the most challenging pathological cases for his view come from the discussion of thought insertion in schizophrenia (Zahavi 2005, 3-4). However, although challenging, the author concludes that they do not show the disruption of the sense of mineness, but rather the disruption of the ‘sense of agency’¹⁰ (Zahavi 2005, 143-144). Gallagher (2012, 132) distinguishes these two senses as follows:

Sense of agency: The pre-reflective experience that I am the one who is causing or generating a movement or action or thought process.

Sense of ownership: The pre-reflective experience that I am the one who is moving or undergoing an experience.

Zahavi claims that in normal cases sense of agency and sense of ownership occur simultaneously, but in abnormal cases such the described ones, they can come apart. Zahavi claims:

“Whereas the sense of agency refers to the sense of being the initiator or source of an action or thought, the sense of ownership refers to the sense that it is my body that is moving, that the experience I am living through are given as mine [...] In cases of involuntary action [as in anarchic hand syndrome], the two [senses] can come apart. If I am pushed or if I am undergoing spasms, I will experience ownership of the movement(s)-I rather than somebody else, am the one moving-but I will lack a sense of agency; I will lack the experience of being the agent or initiator of the movement” (Zahavi 2005, 143-144)

This reply is based on the standard approach to thought insertion proposed by Stephens & Graham (2000) and Gallagher (2000a; 2000b)¹¹. It is important to note that the distinction between agency and ownership was originally introduced by Stephens & Graham (2000) at the level of attributions and for this reason, in their discussion the term ‘sense of agency’ is treated as a result of a (reflective) disposition to make judgments about experience and not as an intrinsic (pre-reflective) property of the way in which experiences are given. However, Gallagher introduces this distinction at the experiential level by suggesting that the ‘sense of agency’

belongs to the intrinsic –normal- appearance of experiences, i.e. pre-reflective¹². Therefore, it is conceptually important to distinguish between the experience of mineness and the judgment (or attribution) of mineness in this discussion (De Hann & De Bruin 2010). Nevertheless, although this distinction introduces several interesting insights to the discussion, there are several reasons why it is problematic:

First, the distinction looks plausible in cases of action awareness in which one can clearly phenomenologically distinguish between voluntary and involuntary movement, namely, as one being the author or having the intention of performing such actions. In fact, it is widely agreed that the standard approach to thought insertion establishes a parallelism between the loss of agency in cases of action with the loss of agency in thinking (Stephens & Graham 2000; Gallagher 2012). However, this is problematic. As in the case of actions, this model presupposes an ‘intention to think’ in any case in which the agent thinks (Mullins & Spence, 2003; Cermolacce, Naudin & Parnas, 2007). In cases of thought insertion, this ‘intention’ (T) would be disrupted resulting in a loss of the sense of agency. However, this leads to an infinite regress: The ‘intention’ (T) itself needs to be a type of thought that accompanies a thought (T*), and this type of thought (T*) needs to have a previous intention that is a type of thought (T**) and so on ad infinitum. Indeed, if every act of thinking is explained by a prior intention to think, the model leads to an infinite regress whenever and agent thinks.

Secondly, the distinction cannot offer an account of the unique phenomenology of thought insertion, or at least: ‘it makes thought insertion lose all of its puzzling features’ (Bortolotti & Broome 2009, 217). The most puzzling aspect of the phenomenology of thought insertion is the ‘alien’ character of the thought that is experienced by the patient. In fact, this is the main aspect that distinguishes thought insertion from obsessive thought, thought withdrawal and influenced thinking (Mullens & Spence 2003). However, by explaining thought insertion on the basis of a disrupted sense of agency and a retained sense of mineness, Zahavi’s reply cannot account for the alien character of the phenomenon. In fact, this account cannot discriminate between normal cases of spontaneous thoughts, obsessive thoughts and cases of thought insertion. In everyday life, many thoughts pop into our mind without being preceded by specific intentions –as Zahavi’s distinction presupposes-. However, this does not lead us to experience these thoughts as ‘not being mine’ i.e. with an alien character. Similarly, Jaspers (1963) claims that obsessive thoughts arise against the patient’s will. This leads the patient to perform different obsessive rituals as attempts to suppress the disrupting obsessive thought. Obsessions have been explained on the basis of a disrupted sense of agency and a retained sense of mineness. However, obsessive thoughts lack the ‘alien’ quality that inserted

thoughts present. Based on these two cases, it seems plausible to say that the distinction fails to offer a distinct account of the phenomenology of thought insertion different from intrusive thoughts and obsessions. This distinction cannot capture the characteristic conflict that a patient suffering from thought insertion faces.

Trying to reply to these objections, Zahavi is forced to make an additional move to deal with the no-sense-of-mineness cases. This move is given by the author's way of understanding experience. Let me explain this point. Following Williams James and against transparency philosophers, Zahavi claims that experiences are always something given to somebody; there are no 'free-floating' experiences¹³ (Gallagher 2012). In experience –through them-, objects are given as having certain properties, 'as appearing in a certain way' (Zahavi 2005, 121). There is therefore, a double dimension to the structure of the givenness of all experiences. According to Zahavi, there is an important difference between asking about the properties that a certain object appears as having (or what the object looks like to the observer) and asking about the properties of the experience of that certain object (or what the perceiving feels like to the perceiver) (Ibid 2005, 121). The former pertains to the properties of the perceived object –which Zahavi calls sensed-, while the latter pertains to the properties of the act of perceiving –which Zahavi calls sensing-. From this, Zahavi claims that: 'We cannot be conscious of an object [a song] unless we are aware of the experience through which this object is made to appear [my listening]' (Ibid, 121) and exemplifies his point by claiming that: 'The taste of the lemon is a qualitative feature of the lemon and must be distinguished from whatever qualities my tasting of the lemon has' (Ibid 2005, 119). Finally, Zahavi suggests that although these two aspects –sensing and sensed- can be conceptually distinguished: 'they cannot be detached and encountered in isolation from one another' (Ibid, 123). Taking this into consideration, Zahavi concludes that in cases of disrupted sense of mineness in action awareness and experiences of conscious thinking (TI), the act of perceiving, acting or thinking (different modes of sensing) is always given as mine, i.e. I am the one undergoing those modes of sensing. In cases of thought insertion, the author concludes that the thought is not given as mine in the sense that I am not the source of that thought, but I am the one experiencing the thought as not being mine (Ibid, 144).

Zahavi's model of experience looks plausible in certain case, such as cases of visual perception. One can clearly distinguish between the way in which, say the chair is given (sensed) and the way in which my experience of the chair is given (sensing). The same applies in cases of bodily perception where one can distinguish, say my hand as having certain properties (sensed) and my experiencing (sensing)¹⁴. Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that this model deals in a more or less plausible

way with cases of disrupted bodily awareness. The model struggles to account for cases of somatoparaphrenic delusion, but for the sake of argument we can ignore this point here. However, this model leads us to some unavoidable problems when it is applied to cases of conscious thinking.

First, as has already been pointed out by Metzinger (2006), a quite general worry is that Zahavi does not explain how the conceptual distinction between sensed and sensing grounds the distinction between the sense of agency and mineness. He explains neither why nor how the former supports the latter.

Secondly and more relevant to our discussion, it is not clear if we can distinguish between the 'givenness of a thought' and the 'givenness of my thinking the thought'. The distinction is equally problematic in cases of inserted emotions, where it is difficult to distinguish between 'an emotion' and 'my experiencing the emotion'. In fact, it is completely plausible that no separation between a 'thought' and 'thinking the thought' can be made. As Cermolacce, Naudin & Parnas (2007) suggest: 'there is no separation here between thinking and a familiarity with what one is thinking' (p. 709). This is because the thinking is the thought itself and –in cases of emotions– the experiencing is the emotion. Therefore, when a patient reports an experience of inserted thought it is not conceptually accurate to propose that the patient preserves a sense of mineness for her thinking. This is because in cases of thought insertion, it is the act of thinking (the thought) that is not given as the patient's act of thinking (thought).

Finally and more importantly, this model of experience leads us to (yet) another infinite regress. Let's understand 'thinking' as a case of 'intellectual experience', just as Zahavi seems to do (Zahavi 2005, 124). Based on Zahavi's model, we need to distinguish between the way in which a thought is given (T: sensed) and the way in which my thinking a thought is given (TT: sensing). In cases of thought insertion (T) would not be given as mine, but (TT) still given as mine. This distinction becomes problematic because 'thinking the thought' (TT) is a type of experience and by definition, we need to distinguish between the givenness of (TT) and the givenness of my thinking (TT) i.e. (TT*) and so on ad infinitum. Therefore, if we understand conscious thinking as a case of intellectual experience, Zahavi's distinction leads to an infinite regress whenever I have an intellectual experience.

Conclusion

Dan Zahavi develops an interesting and philosophically detailed phenomenological approach to the relationship between phenomenal consciousness and self-awareness. In doing so, he suggests that conscious experience has a self-presenting character (SPC) via a sense of mineness. This essay has offered a philosophical assessment of his main argument, focusing on the claim

that no experience lacks a sense of mineness. Roughly speaking, Zahavi proposes that all experiences include a sense of mineness as a part of the way in which they are given. However, reports of people suffering from different pathologies challenge this idea. From the revision of cases of somatoparaphrenic delusions, alien hand syndrome and thought insertion, among others, we concluded some experiences can lack sense of mineness. Zahavi is well aware of the existence of these cases and he elaborates a reply based on the standard approach to thought insertion. However, the author's reply presents several philosophical problems, especially in relation to cases of thought insertion. In analysing cases of thought insertion, Zahavi makes a distinction between the sense of agency and the sense of mineness, which establishes an implausible parallelism between the phenomenology of action and conscious thinking, eventually leading to an infinite regress. In addition, his distinction cannot discriminate between the phenomenology of obsession and everyday disruptive thoughts from cases of disruption of conscious thinking thought. The distinction explains neither the uniqueness of the phenomenology of thought insertion nor the conflict that patients feel when they experience this abnormal experience. Trying to save his argument from these kinds of objections, Zahavi makes a problematic distinction between 'the givenness of an object' (sensed) and the 'givenness of my experience of the object' (sensing). This distinction is plausible in cases of perceptual experience, but it is conceptually inaccurate when applied to cases of conscious thinking and leads to another infinite regress. Finally, based on the philosophical examination offered in this essay, I conclude that although the standard reply adds interesting elements to the discussion, it is philosophically problematic in cases of thought insertion. For this reason, we may conclude that the main argument given by Zahavi in support of the SPC is implausible. This does not refute the SPC, but shows that stronger arguments are needed to defend it.

Endnotes

- ¹ I will follow Dan Zahavi – the main defender of SPC – and refer to this property as the sense of *mineness* and the *sense of ownership* interchangeably
- ² This must not be taken as a metaphysical claim. In his project, Zahavi (2005) takes a Husserlian phenomenological position towards the concepts he wants to explain. This means that Zahavi tries to avoid any theoretical and metaphysical presuppositions regarding the structure of conscious experience, making claims only from the way they appear
- ³ This raises further questions about a possible metaphysical identification of the experiential stream with a ‘minimal self’ (Zahavi 2011). However, our discussion will be focused on the phenomenological discussion. See note 2
- ⁴ The author uses the terms ‘self-awareness’ and ‘self-consciousness’ interchangeably (see: Zahavi 2005, 225)
- ⁵ It is important to note that here ‘implicit’ means ‘pre-reflective’
- ⁶ Moro, Zampini & Aglioti 2004, 440 write about cases of alien hand syndrome: “Stimuli were detected in all trials even though the hand was *still felt as belonging to another person*. Specifically asked about how it was possible to perceive stimuli delivered to another’s hand, the patient reported that ‘many strange things can happen in life.’ ”
- ⁷ The history of the term is full of disagreement and philosophical discussion. For a nice summary of this history (see: Mullins & Spence 2003)
- ⁸ A similar case can be found in cases of inserted emotions in which patients refer to the way that certain emotional states are given to them not as their own states: I cry, tears roll down my cheeks and I look unhappy, but I have a cold anger because they’re using me in this way, and it’s not me who’s unhappy, but they’re projecting unhappiness onto my brain. They project upon me laughter, for no reason, and you have no idea how terrible it is to laugh and look happy and know it’s not you, but their emotions’. (Mellor 1970, 17)
- ⁹ The sense of agency is defined as: “The pre-reflective experience that I am the one who is causing or generating a movement or action or thought process” (Gallagher 2012, 132).
- ¹⁰ For a specific discussion about the definitions of this term, see: De Haan & Leon de Bruin (2009)
- ¹¹ For critical discussion of this approach, see: Bortolotti & Broome (2009) and Martin & Pacherie (2013)
- ¹² In his reply, Zahavi explicitly adopts Gallagher’s distinction (See: Zahavi 2005, 143-144)
- ¹³ James (1980 I, 225) claims that: ‘Every thought is part of a personal consciousness [...] the universal fact is not ‘feelings and thoughts exists’, but ‘I think’ and ‘I feel’, [yet] to give an accurate account of [this] is the most difficult of philosophical tasks’
- ¹⁴ People like De Haan & De Bruin (2009) will criticize this idea

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