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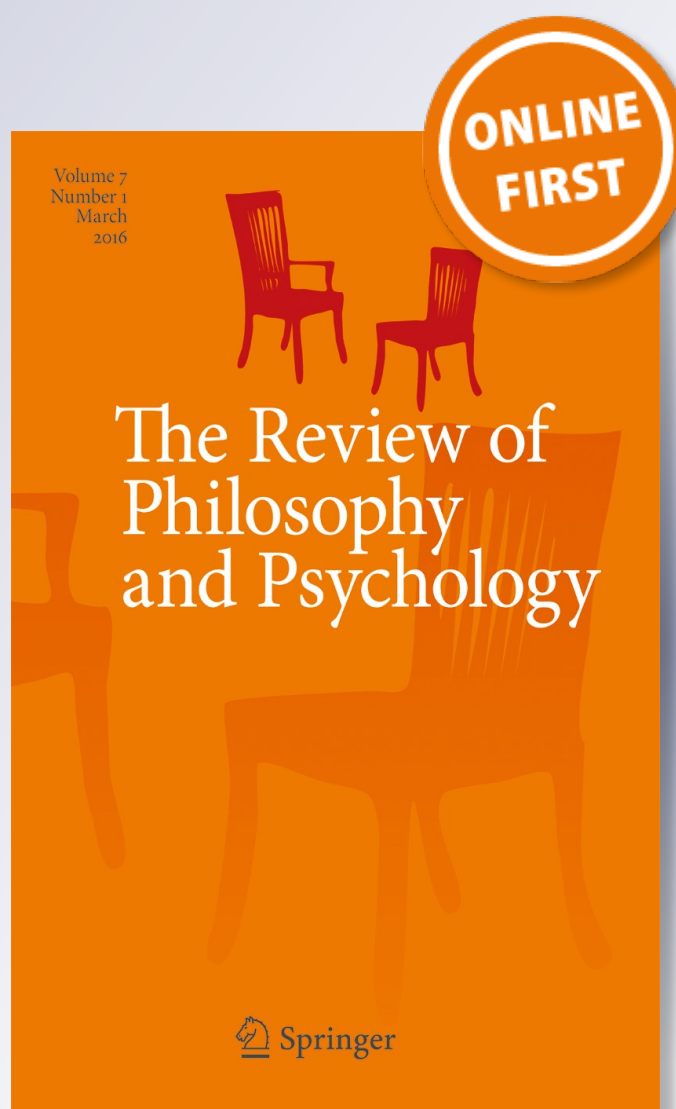
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Phenomenally Mine: In Search of the Subjective Character of Consciousness

Robert J. Howell¹ · Brad Thompson¹

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Abstract It's a familiar fact that there is something it is like to see red, eat chocolate or feel pain. More recently philosophers have insisted that in addition to this objectual phenomenology there is something it is like for me to eat chocolate, and this for-me-ness is no less there than the chocolatishtness. Recognizing this subjective feature of consciousness helps shape certain theories of consciousness, introspection and the self. Though it does this heavy philosophical work, and it is supposed to be relatively obvious to anyone who introspects, it is rather difficult to see just what this phenomenal me-ness is supposed to be; indeed, many philosophers deny it exists. In this paper we try to provide a clear sense of what phenomenal me-ness involves, and then then consider some arguments for the existence of phenomenal me-ness experience as well as some accounts of what gives rise to it. In the end, we argue that the plausible senses of me-ness are a good deal thinner than what often seems to be claimed.

1 Introduction

It's a familiar fact that there is something it is like to see red, eat chocolate or feel pain. More recently philosophers have insisted that in addition to this objectual phenomenology, consciousness is imbued for each of us with a *subjectish* phenomenology. There is something it is like *for me* to eat chocolate, and this *for-me-ness* is no less there than the chocolatishtness. According to these philosophers consciousness has a “me-ness” or a “mine-ness” that is

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phenomenologically salient and philosophically significant. Recognizing this subjectish feature of consciousness helps shape certain theories of consciousness, introspection and the self. Though it does this heavy philosophical work, and it is supposed to be relatively obvious to anyone who introspects, it is rather difficult to see just what this phenomenal me-ness is supposed to be.¹

Our goal in this paper is to articulate different things that could be meant by for-me-ness or subjective character in an attempt to separate the plausible from the implausible and the trivial from the substantial. We will try to provide a clear sense of what phenomenal me-ness involves, distinguishing between several closely related theses. We will then consider some arguments for the existence of phenomenal me-ness as well as some accounts of what gives rise to it.

While we hope to clarify the debate about phenomenal me-ness, our aim is not exegetical. We are not convinced that there is a single notion meant by different philosophers, and we suspect that sometimes philosophers slip between various different notions. While there is a lot of talk of phenomenal me-ness, there is little argument for it and most of the descriptions tell us what it is not, but not what it is. So our goal is not to survey the literature, but to investigate the phenomena themselves to see what is plausible.

In the end, while we do think there are some plausible senses in which phenomenology has me-ness, those senses tend to be distinct from what is often claimed. The sorts of me-ness which seem most plausible, for example, are consistent with numerous views of consciousness and introspection, and they seem to involve particular states of conscious experience with particular qualitative feels rather than something that characterizes conscious experiences in general.

2 Me-ness in the Literature

The philosophers who appear to endorse some thesis about mine-ness, for-me-ness, or the subjectish nature of experience run the gamut. Inspecting a sample of the literature can help us latch on to the right phenomenon, but it will also begin to reveal that a great number of different things might be meant by different authors. Some authors, like Husserl, talk about how subjectivity seems to pervade consciousness.

The Ego appears to be permanently, even necessarily, there, and this permanence is obviously not that of a stolid unshifting experience, or a ‘fixed idea.’ On the contrary, it belongs to every experience that comes and streams past, its “glance” goes “through” every actual cogito and towards the object. {Husserl 1952} p. 156

¹ This phenomenal me-ness, or something like it, goes by many different names—*for-me-ness*, *subjective character*, *phenomenal me-ness*, *experiential subjectivity*, etc. For simplicity's sake we stick with *Phenomenal Me-ness*, but we acknowledge—and indeed believe—that many different things are meant at different times.

Also from the phenomenological tradition, Merleau-Ponty says something similar:

All thought of something is at the same time self-consciousness, failing which it could have no object. At the root of all our experiences and all our reflections, we find, then, a being which immediately recognizes itself because it is its knowledge both of itself and of all things, and which knows its own existence, not by observation and as a given fact, nor by inference from any idea of itself, but through direct contact with that existence. Self-consciousness is the very being of the mind in action. (Merleau-Ponty 1994, P. 371)

More recently, Owen Flanagan seems to endorse something weaker than what Frege (1956) and Husserl (and probably Merleau-Ponty) have in mind, arguing that there is a thin sense of mine-ness but that some stronger sense is illusory:

It is an illusion, fostered by reflection on experience, insofar as reflection requires that we be thinking about thought, that an ‘I think that’ thought accompanies all experience. ... The upshot is that all subjective experience is self-conscious in the weak sense that there is something it is like for the subject to have that experience. This involves a sense that the experience is the subject’s experience, that it happens to her, occurs in her stream. {Flanagan 1992: 194}

Even more recently, a group of philosophers endorses some version or other of the me-ness thesis which appears to be stronger than the one Flanagan intends. According to these philosophers, there is an element in the phenomenology of experience over and above the qualitative “what it’s likeness”. Joseph Levine seems to be advocating this:

There are two important dimensions to my having this reddish experience. First...there is something it is like for me to have this experience. Not only is it a matter of some state (my experience) having some feature (being reddish) but, being an experience, its being reddish is “for me,” a way it’s like for me, in a way that being red is like nothing for—in fact is not in any way for—my diskette case. Let’s call this the subjectivity of conscious experience. {Levine 2001} pp.6–7

Kriegel likewise is clear that he means something distinct from the qualitative character of consciousness:

The bluish way it is like for me has two distinguishable components: (i) the *bluish* component and (ii) the *for-me* component. I call the former *qualitative character* and the latter *subjective character*. ... my conscious experience of the blue sky is the conscious experience it is in virtue of its bluishness, but it is a conscious experience at all in virtue of its for-me-ness. {Kriegel 2009} p.1

There is a lot of room for interpretation regarding what is really meant by “phenomenal me-ness” or “subjective character”. As often as not it is defined by what it is not (qualitative character) and the positive descriptions don’t give us the sort of firm foothold that we have on the what-it’s-likeness of pain and the taste of chocolate. In the next section we develop a more precise standard for what counts as for-me-ness.

3 Distinguishing Phenomenal Me-ness

Despite the many different possible interpretations of “subjective character” and “phenomenal me-ness”, there is a need to settle on some necessary features that such things must have. Doing so risks arbitrariness and accusations of misconstrual, but even if our conditions are deemed unfair, they can at least provide a reference point by which views can be situated. We will consider several notions of me-ness that don’t meet our criteria, but if they are what some authors mean we are happy to yield the terminology.

The first condition on phenomenal me-ness is that its presence make some contribution to the overall phenomenal character of the subject’s experience. Of course things can make a difference to conscious experience without making a contribution in the sense we intend. Planck’s constant makes a difference to conscious experience in that there wouldn’t be any conscious experience if Planck’s constant were much different. But there is no element of phenomenal character that corresponds to the presence of Planck’s constant. There is such an element, on the other hand, corresponding to the presence of pain. This constraint is not meant to imply that subjectishness has to be a case of qualitative character in Kriegel’s sense; it is only to suggest that there must be something in the conscious field, introspectively observable, that constitutes the contribution of me-ness.²

While the first condition can be seen as requiring that phenomenal me-ness be phenomenal, the second condition is meant to insure that it is a case of me-ness or mine-ness as opposed to something else, like nowness. All parties surely agree that not just any phenomenal quality constitutes phenomenal me-ness. What-it’s-like for me to see red versus blue is not a candidate for me-ishness. There has to be something else, in addition to such components of qualitative consciousness that constitutes me-ness. But what makes it me-ness as opposed to, say, now-ness? It has to be that the contribution to phenomenal character in some sense represents or refers to the self as opposed to something else. This is not to say that it has to represent the self in the same way that a red sensation represents a color or one’s visual experience represents a cat on a mat. The self may be presented to the subject in a special or “non-objectual” manner. But there has to be some property that makes it a subjectish experience rather than something else. It is hard to see how this can be the case without there being some representational element involved.

So the *Necessary Condition for Phenomenal Me-ness* has two parts:

- 1) The Phenomenal Condition—Phenomenal me-ness must make some contribution to a subject’s total phenomenal character; and
- 2) The Representational Condition—Phenomenal me-ness must in some way present or refer to the self.

² Kriegel (2009) p. 375 claims that this me-ness is not introspectible, though it is phenomenologically apparent. On some level we find this unintelligible, unless a particular model of introspection is presupposed. All we mean by introspection here is the way we know our own experiences and no-one else’s, and on that reading it is difficult to see how anything could be phenomenologically manifest that is not introspectible.

Given these conditions we can articulate the basic thesis of phenomenal me-ness: (PM): There is something that meets the necessary condition for phenomenal me-ness.

There are several importantly distinct ways one could hold PM since the necessary conditions involve several ambiguities. For example, one could hold that PM is met whenever a subject is conscious, or one could hold that PM is met whenever a conscious subject reflects and introspects. This distinction generates an *unreflective* and a *reflective* reading of PM. It might not be implausible, for example, that while in the thick of experience—returning a serve in tennis, for example—that there is no me-ness anywhere to be found, but that one finds it whenever one introspects afterwards.

Another important distinction is whether phenomenal me-ness is indexical or singular. In other words, is the me-ness I experience the same phenomenally (and semantically) as the me-ness you experience? Or is there a distinct phenomenal character that each of us has in virtue of which we are presented to ourselves? Do Sally and Jim each have their own “Sallyishness” or “Jimness” or is there a generic me-ness which each of them has and which presents each of them to themselves? This distinction generates a *singular* and an *indexical* reading of PM.

We thus can have at least the following very distinct versions of PM:

- Singular Reflective PM
- Indexical Reflective PM
- Singular Unreflective PM
- Indexical Unreflective PM

In general, we are quite skeptical of either of the singular theses. The singular thesis implies that each of us has some phenomenal state—or some feature of a phenomenal state—that cannot be had by anyone else. For our part, we find that for every phenomenal state it is conceivable that someone else has a type identical state. Even if one isn't sure about this, it is worth noting that the singular PM theses entail a failure of supervenience and the falsity of physicalism, assuming that physical duplicates are possible. If physical duplicates are possible, then Sally can have a physical duplicate Sally*. But if there is singular PM, the physical duplicate will not be a phenomenal duplicate since Sally and Sally* will have different phenomenal me-nesses. Thus supervenience fails and physicalism is false.³ Perhaps there are good arguments for the failure of supervenience, but it is implausible that it follows from the mere possibility of physical duplicates. We're inclined, therefore, to focus on indexical PM since it at least has a ring of plausibility and doesn't involve immediately problematic implications.

³ We assume here that it would not make much sense to identify PM with a bare particular (that differs between Sally and Sally*), since its bareness would seem to rule out its making a phenomenal/qualitative contribution.

4 False Phenomenal Me-ness

Several candidates for phenomenal me-ness do not meet our conditions.⁴ We suspect few theorists of me-ness would claim that they mean any of these things, but there is at least some risk of slippage between these false me-nesses and something more substantial, so it's worth having them on the table.

4.1 Phenomenal Consciousness

One obviously unhelpful conception of for-me-ness simply equates for-me-ness with consciousness. Since all but a few eliminativists believe in the existence of consciousness, such a reading would render the debate about for-me-ness purely verbal. But the debate over for-me-ness is not supposed to be verbal—after all, the existence of for-me-ness or subjective character is supposed to motivate certain theories of consciousness. Many sensible philosophers are realists about phenomenal consciousness but have doubts about the existence of for-me-ness. And the notion of a state being phenomenally conscious does not entail that the state presents or represents the subject of the experience.

That said, the dialectic here can become complicated when considering theories of phenomenal consciousness, such as Kriegel's self-representational theory of consciousness, that hold that a state is conscious in part because of the presence of a mental state that represents itself or the subject.⁵ If such a view were correct, then it could be that "phenomenal consciousness" and "for-me-ness" (or some variety of for-me-ness) are in fact co-extensive and any state that is phenomenally conscious is necessarily a state that has for-me-ness. And indeed, many of the advocates of for-me-ness hold views of this sort. Even if such a theory of consciousness is correct, it is clear that for-me-ness and phenomenal consciousness are distinct concepts, and that there remains a burden on advocates of for-me-ness to have some positive explication of what for-me-ness is, beyond simply saying that it is something all phenomenally conscious states have. We have offered at least a minimal explication via our two conditions.

4.2 My Phenomenal Consciousness

Another deflationary view is that phenomenal me-ness just is phenomenal consciousness when had by me. This would be a *sense* of me-ness, since after all the consciousness is for me if it is mine. But this would be a fairly trivial metaphysical fact that would require no phenomenological investigation whatsoever. Metaphysically, the me-ness here would be the same as the me-ness of the activity in my liver. Both are mine. Phenomenologically, of course, the cases are not on par since there is something it is like to have phenomenal consciousness and not something it is like to have activity in my liver. There is no phenomenological personalisation here, however, even on the

⁴ And we note again that if someone wants to call one of these proposals phenomenal me-ness they should feel free. But the discussion will be advanced if authors make clear that they do not intend something that meets our conditions.

⁵ Kriegel (2009)

periphery. There is nothing the “for me” adds to the phenomenological current, and the self is not represented in any sense on this reading.

4.3 Consciousness for Me

Me-ness philosophers are fond of insisting that all of my consciousness is consciousness for me. Does this constitute anything more than the metaphysical fact noted above, that my phenomenal consciousness is mine? Let's grant for a moment that in part as a result of introspection a subject can tell that a particular conscious experience is theirs. Even if this is so, it doesn't follow that the necessary conditions for phenomenal me-ness are satisfied. It doesn't follow, in other words, that there is some me-ness that is making a contribution to phenomenal character. It might be just a brute fact that whenever an organism with the relevant concepts and capacities has an experience, that organism is in a position to self-ascribe it. (Note that we aren't committing to this view at this point—rather, the possibility of the view shows that the inference isn't valid.) Consider the now-ness analogy: in part based on introspection one can know that experiences must occur at a time, and that whenever I am introspecting that time must be now. It doesn't follow that there is phenomenal nowness.

4.4 Consciousness of Consciousness

Some philosophers occasionally sound as though the mine-ness or “for-me-ness” of an experience simply amounts to the fact that when we are conscious, we are conscious of being conscious.⁶ There is one way of thinking about “consciousness of consciousness” that can easily be set aside. When pains are conscious we are conscious of our consciousness of pain, at least insofar as it would be strange to say that we have a conscious pain but are not conscious of our consciousness of it. Of course a creature can be conscious of a pain without believing it is conscious of it, since many creatures can feel pain but lack the cognitive sophistication to form beliefs about consciousness. But to say that one is not conscious of one's consciousness of pain makes it sound as though one really isn't conscious of the pain at all (or that the pain is unconscious). It is similarly true to say that whenever we are yelling we are yelling our yell. But this doesn't imply that there is a second order yelling, and consciousness of consciousness doesn't imply that there is a second order consciousness.

There is a more substantive view that consciousness is always consciousness of consciousness. Sartre held the view that every episode of pre-reflective consciousness takes or “posits” an object distinct from itself but that every episode of pre-reflective consciousness involves a “non-positional” or “non-thetic” consciousness of itself. Some of the arguments we discuss below can be seen as attempts to develop this idea in such a way as to constitute a form of PM. On its face, however, the Sartrean position denies that there is any awareness or representation here of a self or ego. And so this understanding of “consciousness of consciousness” fails to meet at least one, if not both, our conditions for phenomenal me-ness.

One could argue, of course, that construed a certain way this “non-thetic” self consciousness does satisfy our conditions. On this view conscious states are aware of

⁶ This seems to be the view of Williford (forthcoming a).

themselves as parts of the “individuated stream of consciousness,” and this is part of a subject’s pre-reflective consciousness.⁷ This view deserves consideration, but we are skeptical of the proposal for several reasons. First, it sounds strange to say that a state of consciousness is aware of itself. Subjects are aware of things, not states. Perhaps it is meant that the subject is aware of having the state in virtue of some self-reflexive content of the state. This is a possible view, but it is by no means forced on us by phenomenology. It seems natural to say that the subject is aware of the state because it is a conscious state and that were it not a conscious state it could have all the self-reflexive content one desired and still fail to be something the subject was aware of.⁸

The second worry about this view is that even if there is some sort of “non-thetic” self-consciousness that comes with every conscious state, it seems clear to us anyway that the states don’t represent themselves *as* conscious states, or *as* elements of an individuated conscious stream, at least if that involves there being any self-conceptualization involved. Creatures that have no such concepts can surely have conscious states. If it is not conceptual, though, it is hard to imagine what gives us the “as.” Of course there might be something about conscious states that makes it appropriate for creatures with such concepts to conceptualize them without fail as their own conscious states, but it doesn’t follow from this that these features either 1) make a difference to the overall phenomenal state of the individual over and above their simply being conscious states or 2) represent the self or any other individual or individuated state. We therefore think it would take significant argument to show that even this more substantive notion of consciousness of consciousness satisfies our two conditions.⁹

4.5 Epistemic Privilege

One interpretation of me-ness is just that my experiences are such that only I can know them in a particular way. That is, PM might just be a matter of my special access to my experiences. This special access could come in different varieties.¹⁰ It could be that the experiences are self-intimating, or it could be that I am supposed to be infallible with respect to them. It might just be that I am in a unique epistemic position with respect to them. It is likely that this is the sort of thing Shoemaker has in mind when he makes a statement that sounds suspiciously like an endorsement of PM.

I certainly think that it is essential to a philosophical understanding of the mental that we appreciate that there is a first-person perspective on it, a distinctive way mental states present themselves to the subjects whose states they are, and that an essential part of the philosophical task is to give an account of mind which makes

⁷ We thank an anonymous referee for putting the view this way and forcing us to face it more squarely.

⁸ This gets us into debates about the viability of the self-representational theory of consciousness that deserve (and have received) discussion beyond what we can give them here. See Kriegel and Williford (2006).

⁹ It is worth noting that Sartre, averse as he is to positing non-conscious governors of our mental lives, will automatically assume that the irresistible impulse to self-ascribe conscious states is grounded in a conscious, phenomenologically salient feature of those states. Since almost no one nowadays shares (or should share, in any case) this aversion, we shouldn’t make his same assumptions. For an excellent discussion that develops the Sartrean view discussed here, see Williford (forthcoming b).

¹⁰ For a thorough discussion of the varieties and approaches to them, see Gertler (2010).

intelligible the perspective mental subjects have on their own mental states. {Shoemaker 1996} p.157

There is certainly an epistemic asymmetry between a person's access to her own states and other people's access to her states. But again, privileged access doesn't meet our conditions. For one thing, it's not clear that this epistemic feature is phenomenally manifest, or that it constitutes a feature of phenomenal character. Of course conscious states with phenomenal character are paradigm cases of states to which we have privileged access, but that doesn't imply that such access is the result of a form of me-ness that is phenomenologically manifest.

5 Phenomenological Arguments, for and Against Phenomenal Me-ness

Now that we have a survey of possible candidates for phenomenal me-ness that do exist but that don't meet the PM criteria, we can consider some arguments for the existence of something more robust. Most of the arguments for the existence of phenomenal me-ness amount to exhortations to introspection and phenomenological reflection. The problem with these arguments is that many philosophers (including, frankly, the two of us) aren't sure they can find anything like me-ness. Most famously, of course, Hume denied finding anything but the experiences themselves.

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. (Hume 1978: 252)

Hume's observation doesn't immediately entail that there is no me-ness to experiences, but it would be somewhat surprising if he was led to deny that he had any awareness of a self if he were aware of a part of phenomenal consciousness that referred to or represented the self, which is part of the necessary condition for me-ness.

More recently, philosophers have been attracted to transparency theses which hold, in one way or another, that we are not aware of our sensations at all but are only aware of the world around us. Sartre held this, at least about non-reflective consciousness. He claimed that the ego is a transcendent entity and not within consciousness at all, because 'if it existed...it would slide into every consciousness like an opaque blade' (Sartre 1957: 40). Purging consciousness of the ego, meanwhile, 'recovers its primary transparency. In a sense, it is a nothing, since all physical, psycho-physical, and psychic objects, all truths, all values are outside it; since my me has itself ceased to be any part of it.' (Sartre 1957: 93). While Sartre focused on pure, non-reflective consciousness others have emphasized that even in reflection or introspection, the stuff of the mind is too slippery to grasp. G. E. Moore famously held:

Though philosophers have recognized that something distinct is meant by consciousness, they have never yet had a clear conception of what that something is...The moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see what, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere

emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous. (Moore 1903: 450)

Gilbert Harman concurs:

When Eloise sees a tree before her, the colors she experiences are all experienced as features of the tree and its surroundings. None of them are experiences as intrinsic features of her experience. Nor does she experience any features of anything as intrinsic features of her experience. And that is true of you too. (Harman 1990: 31)

And Harman has been followed by many others, including (Tye 2000, 113: 51–2) and (Dretske 1995: 62).

There are a number of different transparency theses, and in our view several of them are too strong. (Kind 2003; Howell and Robert 2013) We are disinclined, for example, to believe that reflections on phenomenological transparency can tell us anything conclusive about the metaphysics of experience or the existence of experiential intermediaries. (Howell and Robert 2013; Thompson 2009). Nevertheless, we are inclined to accept at least the following, rather weak version of the thesis:

Unreflective Naive Transparency We are not directly aware of our conscious experiential states as experiential states. This thesis, which has a good deal of phenomenological support, would seem to fly in the face of at least unreflective PM. Sartre, one of the most observant of the phenomenologists, writes that in the immediacy of unreflective experience:

I am then plunged into the world of objects; it is they which constitute the unity of my consciousness; it is they which present themselves with values, with attractive and repellent qualities—but *me*, I have disappeared; I have annihilated myself. There is no place for me on this level. And this is not a matter of chance, due to a momentary lapse of attention, but it happens because of the very structure of consciousness. (Sartre 1993: 49)

If Sartre is right about this, and we think he is, phenomenology is inconsistent with anything stronger than a reflective PM thesis.

Kriegel responds to this sort of consideration by focusing upon what transparency theorists say about introspection—namely that the only introspectible content is world-directed. He argues that in introspection the peripheral inner awareness that is *me-ness* is made focal and so is no longer a peripheral inner awareness. So, he says, “the right—indeed, only prediction to make is that peripheral inner awareness is not introspectible.” (Kriegel 2009, p.373). There are several problems with this argument. First, the data the transparency theorists adduce does not merely support claims about what we find in introspection. They focus on introspection because they think that *even* in introspection we only find the world. It’s not as though they leave it open that there is non-worldly stuff in pre-introspected experience. They think it’s simply obvious that before introspection we don’t think of our experiences as experiences at all, and in that they seem to be right. Second, Kriegel’s argument seems to be that a peripheral experience is annihilated when made focal. But this doesn’t follow. It is just that it is no longer peripheral.

Dan Zahavi offers phenomenological reflections that he seems to think establish the stronger, unreflective thesis. He argues:

Imagine a situation where you first see a green apple and then see a yellow lemon. Then imagine that your visual perception of the yellow lemon is succeeded by a recollection of the yellow lemon. ...If we compare the initial situation where we perceived a green apple with the final situation where we recollected a yellow lemon, there had been a change both of the object and the intentional type. Does such a change leave nothing unchanged in the experiential flow? Is the difference between the first experience and the last experience as radical as the difference between my current experience and the current experience of someone else? We should deny this. Whatever their type, whatever their object, there is something that the different experiences have in common. Not only is the first experience retained by the last experience, but the different experiences are all characterized by the same fundamental first-personal character. They are all characterized by what might be called a dimension of for-me-ness or mineness... (Zahavi 2005: 58)

Zahavi's argument seems to be that if we reflect on two of our experiences E1 and E2 that differ in both object and attitude we will still find something in common. Of course he is right, something is in common between E1 and E2—they are both had by the same subject and they are both experiences. But this implies nothing about phenomenal character and doesn't get anything that satisfies PM. Is there some phenomenal character in common between E1 and E2? It's far from clear. Zahavi seems to recognize this, and offers the following help:

Some might object that there is no property common to all my experiences, no stamp or label that clearly identifies them as mine. But this objection is misplaced in that it looks for the commonality in the wrong place. The for-me-ness or mineness in question is not a quality like scarlet, sour or soft. It doesn't refer to a specific experiential content, to a specific what, nor does it refer to the diachronic or synchronic sum of such content, or to some other relation that might obtain between the contents in question. Rather it refers to the distinct givenness or how of experience. It refers to the first-personal presence of experience. It refers to the fact that the experiences I am living through are given differently (but not necessarily better) to me than to anybody else. It could consequently be claimed that anybody who denies the for-me-ness or mineness of experience simply fails to recognize a constitutive aspect of experience. (Zahavi 2005: 59)

Unfortunately it isn't clear that Zahavi's arguments here give us anything other than the metaphysical and epistemic views that fail to satisfy the necessary conditions for PM. We still haven't found a phenomenological argument that gives us unreflective PM. This is important because it raises the possibility, which we will discuss later, that it is in fact the reflecting that is giving rise to the sense of me-ness and that intuitions

otherwise are a result of something like the “refrigerator light illusion.” (Block 2001; Schear 2009)¹¹

Even if Zahavi is right, however, and our experiences do share some characteristic or other, that isn't enough to establish PM. Suppose there is an inner hum that constantly resides in the periphery of our experience. At most that satisfies the condition that phenomenal *me*-ness make a contribution to phenomenal character. There must also be something that makes it *me*-ness. What makes the hum *me*-ness versus, for example, *now*-ness? We are skeptical that this question can be answered by phenomenological data alone. It is true, of course, that no one is inclined to deny, upon reflection, that their experiences are theirs. But this does not by itself show that it is something phenomenal that makes this the case. That would require something further than mere phenomenological reflection, and to those arguments we now turn.

6 Arguments from Self-Reference and Self-Knowledge

It is generally accepted that we have self-referential thoughts with important peculiarities. These most basic I-thoughts constitute what it is to think of ourselves in the first-personal manner. They involve “thinking of ourselves as a subject” (Wittgenstein 1958: 66–67) and “the essential indexical” (Perry 1979). These I-thoughts enjoy certain epistemic, semantic and motivational privileges that cry out for explanation.¹² Among them:

Infallible Self-Reference: I-thoughts cannot fail to refer to the thinker of the thoughts.

Certain Self-Reference: A thinker of an I-thought knows with certainty that she is referring to herself.

Motivational Immediacy: I-thoughts connect descriptive information about the world to the motivations of the thinker.

One extremely promising argument for the existence of PM, made by Grünbaum (2012), argues that these three characteristics of self-reference can only be plausibly explained if there is PM.¹³

The basic argument is as follows. It is very plausible that:

The three features characterizing the first-personal self-reference of conscious thinking are (partly) explained by the way in which a conscious subject is presented to herself in conscious experience. That is, it is something about

¹¹ Not only does phenomenological reflection fail to support the unreflective PM theses, it also can't support the singular PM theses. How could it establish that my *me*-ness is different from everyone else's when I only have access to my own?

¹² We limit ourselves to the peculiarities of self-reference mentioned in Grünbaum (2012) as it is his argument we will consider, but one can easily imagine making a similar argument from the phenomenon of Immunity to Error through Misidentification (Shoemaker 1968). It should be clear to those familiar with that status that our response here would apply to that argument as well. See also Howell (2006) for other reasons to doubt that IEM would require something like PM.

¹³ It should be noted that Grünbaum (2012) does not explicitly endorse our necessary conditions for PM. He does seem to intend his description of “minimal self-consciousness” to be an example of what we have called PM, and he cites a similar literature. In any case, his argument is still a strong and interesting contender for establishing what we are calling PM.

consciousness that (is part of what) explains our ability to think about ourselves in the first person way. (Grünbaum 2012: 278)

If conscious experience were anonymous, however, and lacked phenomenal me-ness, it could not explain the three characteristics of first-personal self reference. So, PM must be true.

In premise/conclusion form, then:

1. Phenomenal consciousness is part of what explains the unique features of self-consciousness.
2. If PM is false, phenomenal consciousness could not be part of what explains the unique features of self-consciousness.

Therefore, PM is true.¹⁴

In essence, if phenomenally conscious experiences lack me-ness, they leave the question of their bearer open. But if they do that, it is hard to see how they could play any important role in explaining the peculiarities of self-consciousness.

One obvious way to respond to this argument is to deny the first premise. Plenty of accounts of self-consciousness do not give a central role—at least in any obvious way—to phenomenal consciousness. Perry himself doesn't give a central role to phenomenal consciousness in his explanations of self-reference.¹⁵ Nor, for that matter, do the other early theorists of the first person, including Anscombe (1975); Chisholm (1981), Lewis (1979) or Evans (1982). Nor do more recent contributors to the debate such as Bermudez (1998), Shoemaker (1996) and Feit (2008). Whether or not these views are adequate is of course a matter of some debate, but there are clearly plenty of options that theorists have found independently plausible that don't accept premise one.

Nevertheless, there is something odd about claiming that our most fundamental form of self-consciousness doesn't depend on the nature of consciousness.¹⁶ We're inclined to grant that much. But from the fact that consciousness underpins basic self-consciousness it doesn't follow that it does so in virtue of some feature of its phenomenal character or content. Grünbaum's argument is ultimately that if phenomenal states are "anonymous" the prime candidates to explain self-reference in terms of phenomenal consciousness don't work. But there is an important ambiguity in claiming that phenomenal states are "anonymous." On one reading to be anonymous is to lack self-referring characteristics that manifest themselves in phenomenal character. This is the reading needed to establish PM. But there is another reading according to which states are not anonymous if the question of their bearer is not left open. These aren't equivalent since the question of the bearer of the states need not be answered by something in the phenomenal character of the states. Indeed, it's hard to see how it could be since one could doubt that anything in the phenomenal content of the states truly referred to oneself. (This is especially true if PM is limited to indexical PM.) As Grünbaum admits, "it seems likely that a subject can always become alienated from the

¹⁴ This is a simplification of the argument made by (Grünbaum 2012: 275).

¹⁵ See Perry (1979), (1990), (1997), (2001) and Crimmins and Perry (1989).

¹⁶ Some theorists, for example Russell (1914); Peacocke (1983), (2014); Martens (1989), and Howell (2006) are explicit about accepting premise one, and others such as Castaneda et al. (1999), and O'Brien, Lucy (2007) seem sympathetic. Grünbaum supports his claims in Grünbaum, Thor (2012: 288–290)

content of her experience in a way that is not intelligible if it is supposed to explain first-person self-reference.” (Grünbaum 2012: 293) This would seem to apply to anything that might constitute phenomenal me-ness.¹⁷ Just because an experience has a phenomenal characteristic labelling it “Mine!” doesn’t prevent me from wondering if it is really mine. It is difficult to see how any more sophisticated story of PM can assuage this concern. If this is the case, PM isn’t going to be an important part of a solution to the puzzles of self-reference.¹⁸

7 Pathological Contrasts

An excellent way to locate PM would be to find cases where it is absent. Certain pathological conditions might seem best explained by the lack of PM, thus providing a good abductive argument for the PM thesis. Such an argument seems most compelling given the peculiar phenomena involved in “thought insertion” and Cotard’s Delusion.¹⁹

7.1 Thought Insertion

Thought insertion is a delusion that leads patients to believe that their own thoughts are actually someone else’s, inserted (perhaps insidiously) into their minds. (Graham 2010: 245) Such patients make claims like: “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 are his thoughts.” (Frith 1992: 66) Subjects report thoughts that are “in them” but that are not theirs. (Billon 2011: 2) Since these states appear to be conscious—at least in the sense that the patients are conscious of them—it is tempting to think there is some feature that some conscious states lack in these pathological cases. They are conscious, the story would go, but the patients don’t identify with them because they lack phenomenal me-ness.

The PM thesis gains strength from the failure of alternative explanations. One prominent alternative hypothesis, promoted by Gallagher (2000) and Graham and Stephens et al. (2000) is that in cases of thought insertion there is a lack of agency involved. According to Graham:

A thought, such as my thought about a loaf of bread, may be attributed to oneself in either of two ways or senses. It may be attributed to oneself as a subject to whom it occurs. Or it may be attributed to oneself as the agent who does the

¹⁷ This objection applies to a related argument by Zahavi and Kriegel ([forthcoming](#)) in which they claim “One straightforward explanation of the intuitiveness of the claim that all conscious states are states we are aware of is that every conscious state has a for-me-ness built into its very phenomenal character.” Again, this just pushes the question back—why are we aware of this for-me-ness? It’s not clear how a phenomenal characteristic can explain consciousness if our awareness of it must itself be conscious.

¹⁸ To be fair, Grünbaum’s argument isn’t trying to establish what we are calling PM. His own view seems to involve a “me-ish” mode of apprehending content, which would seem consistent with the anonymity of what is apprehended. We are, in fact, sympathetic with something like this view. See Howell (2006) for a view in this ballpark.

¹⁹ Because they think “for-me-ness” accompanies all consciousness, Zahavi and Kriegel cannot use these cases of pathological consciousness to defend for-me-ness. They explicitly deny that these cases lack for-me-ness in Zahavi and Kriegel ([forthcoming](#)).

thinking. Thought insertion represents a misattribution of the agency behind a thought (and not its subjectivity). (Graham 2010: 248)

The idea is that when the thoughts of schizophrenics lack the sense of agency or control, those patients infer that they are not theirs. After all, they lack a distinctive mark of their thoughts.

The problem with this explanation is that there are thoughts lacking a sense of agency but that are not felt to be 'inserted.' Most obvious are cases of "intrusive thoughts" which appear to us unbidden but nonetheless seem to be our thoughts. Most of us are familiar with cases like this. Parents probably can relate to the unwelcome and involuntary thought that something has happened to their child. Sufferers of OCD experience more tortuous cases that seem to resist agency:

Patients diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorders (OCD) are incessantly haunted with intrusive thoughts that they constantly try to resist. ... At some point, the occurrence of the thought will seem literally irresistible and the associated feeling of passivity will be radical... Even then, patients with OCD will acknowledge that the intrusive thoughts are really theirs. (Billon 2011:6)

If there can be thoughts that don't seem inserted but lack a sense of agency, something other than the sense of agency must explain the difference between "unowned" inserted thoughts and "owned" thoughts. One natural proposal is that this is PM.²⁰

The phenomenon of thought insertion suggests that there is something phenomenological that characterizes our thoughts and that leads to a sense of ownership of them. Such a thing might involve PM, but it might not. A common approach to delusional thinking combines both something evidential, like phenomenal stimulus (or lack thereof), and a reasoning bias that leads the subject to form irrational beliefs based on that evidence. (Davies et al. 2001). The presence of this "second factor" determines how a subject updates her beliefs in the face of new evidence, and it could allow the agency view to account for the difference between agents who have intrusive thoughts and agents who have inserted thoughts. The latter but not the former take the lack of a sense of agency to be sufficient evidence for lack of ownership. This strategy need not be limited to the agency view. There could be numerous factors that typically characterize our thoughts (or fail to characterize our thoughts) that when missing (or when present) lead some people but not others to beliefs about insertion because of differences in the way the subjects update beliefs in light of that fact. These factors are probably phenomenologically salient, but they might or might not themselves represent or refer to the self. Compare the phenomenon of Capgras' syndrome in which sufferers believe that their family members and others are not the real thing but are perhaps

²⁰ Billon's own proposal is that inserted thoughts are not phenomenally conscious. This proposal deserves further discussion, but it doesn't seem to fit with the reports by patients who say things like "He treats my mind like a screen and flashes his thoughts onto it like you flash a picture." (Mellor 1970: 10) It is worth mentioning, though, that those who tie PM to the existence of consciousness like Kriegel (2009) and others who are inclined towards self representational approaches to consciousness (Kriegel and Williford 2006) will have to adopt Billon's extreme approach if they think thought insertion indicates a lack of PM.

replaced by clones. It is relatively well-accepted that Capgras patients lack some emotional or familiarity response, perhaps due to problems in the limbic system.²¹ It seems plausible that this response is connected to representations of the person, but the familiarity response is not itself a representation of “family member” or “brother.” Similarly, it seems plausible that the missing ingredient in cases like thought insertion are not themselves representations of the self or “mine-ness” but nevertheless lead to a delusional sense of impersonalization when they are missing.

7.2 Cotard's Syndrome

Individuals suffering from Cotard's syndrome might deny that they have a body, that they are alive, or even that they exist. (Graham 2010: 239) There is strong evidence that Cotard's delusion is deeply connected to severe depersonalization disorders which involve a range of phenomena including lack of bodily ownership, feelings of loss of agency, feelings of disembodiment, emotional numbing and alienation from surroundings. (Sierra 2009: 28–39) Patients who suffer from depersonalization frequently say it is “as if” they are disembodied, dead or nonexistent. Those rare patients who suffer from Cotard's syndrome seem to withdraw the “as if” and suffer from the delusion that they really do not have feelings, bodies or thoughts. (Billon forthcoming: 17) Here is a description by Gerrans: “The Cotard patient experiences her perceptions and cognitions, not as changes in herself, but [as] changes in the states of the universe, one component of which is her body, which now feels like an inanimate physical substance, first decomposing and finally disappearing.” (Gerrans 2002, 50, as quoted by Graham (2010) p.240.) Ramachandran mentions, in fact, that patients who suffer from this syndrome have a “curious indifference” to pain. “They feel pain as a sensation but... there is no agony. As a desperate attempt to restore the ability to feel something—anything!—such patients may try to inflict pain on themselves in order to feel more ‘anchored’ in their bodies.” (Ramachandran 2011. p.282) It is tempting to say that in these cases, the pains and sensations are lacking the crucial me-ness that we are looking for. The loss of the sense of PM from the phenomenal field leads the delusional patient to “disown” her body, her feelings, and in the extreme her existence.

As with many severe pathologies, it isn't easy to settle on an explanation of what is going on.²² Nevertheless, it isn't implausible that severe depersonalization and Cotard's delusion involve some abnormalities of phenomenal consciousness. Again though, it is unclear whether this is due to the loss of phenomenal self-representation, or instead involves some other change in experience that ordinarily plays a role in our beliefs concerning ownership.

8 The Argument from Self-Consciousness

According to one recent school of thought about conscious experience, conscious experiences represent not only objects but themselves as well. This view is driven in part by the intuition that all consciousness is consciousness of itself, but it can be given

²¹ See, for example, Ellis et al. (1997); Hirstein and Ramachandran (1997), and Morris et al. (2008).

²² For a discussion of various accounts of delusion and difficulties that beset them, see Bortolotti (2009).

more robust defense than that. It isn't implausible, on the face of it, that for x to be conscious requires a subject be aware of x , and for a subject to be aware of x requires that the subject be in a mental state that represents x . (Hill and Christopher 2009: 69) To some, this sort of thought leads them to a higher-order theory of consciousness, according to which a mental state is made conscious by being represented by a higher-order state.²³ This view comes with certain puzzles, however. Among them is that it seems plausible that a higher-order state could make a lower-order state conscious only if that higher-order state was conscious itself. But this leads to a vicious infinite regress of higher-order states. (Rowlands 2001)

One response to this challenge is to adopt a view according to which conscious states involve two representational contents. They represent objects and qualities, but they also represent themselves. Since one and the same state is conscious of the object and self conscious, the regress stops at the first step.

These views face numerous objections, but their plausibility isn't the main issue here. We are interested in the implications this view has for PM. It's most prominent recent proponent, Uriah Kriegel, suggests that one of the most compelling motivations for the view is that it can explain "subjective character" or PM. But does it? In fact the same-order view doesn't entail that there is PM and might not even be consistent with some accounts of it. This means that it cannot fully explain PM, and its plausibility cannot provide support for the idea of PM.

Self-representational views of consciousness are supposed to account for (and entail) PM because there are two parts to the experience's experiential content, one that is world directed and the other that is self-directed. For example, a red experience represents redness in the world, making the subject aware of the red in the world, while the red experience also represents itself, thus making the subject aware of the experience. This outwardly directed content explains the qualitative character of the experience, while the self-directed part explains the subjective character of experience.

Setting aside worries about the phenomenological adequacy of this account (such as its apparent denial of transparency) it is difficult to see why anything like PM should result. If I have an awareness of a stop sign, that stop sign in no way becomes mine—it does not gain me-ness. If so then awareness of x is not enough to give x me-ness. This should hold for awareness of awareness as well. It doesn't seem to matter whether the awareness of the awareness is really a separate act of awareness or not. Suppose one state had two contents simultaneously—an outward directed content and a self-directed content. Why would there being one state with the two contents generate me-ness anymore than there being two states? The only reason the self-representing state would give rise to PM would be if the first order state is already imbued with some phenomenally apparent quality of mine-ness. But nothing about the self-representational view entails that this would be so.

Perhaps the idea is that since the represented conscious state is itself a state of the subject, the subject represents that relationship of "belonging to the subject" and this explains me-ness. But it doesn't follow that when one represents a state of a thing—and thereby in some sense perceives the thing—that one is representing the state as being a state of that particular thing. One can see the greenness of the caterpillar without

²³ The locus classici for these sorts of views are Armstrong and David (1968); Lycan and William (1996) and Rosenthal (1986, 1993, 2005).

recognizing that the greenness belongs to the caterpillar, or that there is even a caterpillar there to be seen. And not only is this possible, but merely seeing the greenness of the caterpillar will not guarantee that one is in a position to recognize that it is a property of the caterpillar or that there is a caterpillar to be seen. It likewise seems true that one could represent a state of oneself without experiencing that state as being a state of oneself. Considerations in favor of the transparency of experience suggest that this is precisely the case in perception. When we see a tree, we are having sensory experiences but they serve to present the tree, not ourselves. To belabor the point, it is also true in some sense that if I represent my own experience, and that experience is a neural event, then I have thereby represented a neural event. But this sort of observation lends no credence to the idea that there is such a thing as “phenomenal neuralness” present in my experience.

Perhaps in recognition of this, Kriegel (2009) argues for his self-representational theory in a way that is non-committal regarding whether or not pre-reflective self-consciousness involves any awareness of oneself or any awareness of an experience as one's own. Indeed, he suggests that even if there is such self-awareness in normal adult human experience, it may be lacking in infants and non-human animals, and is thus not a necessary condition for the form of “self”-representation that he thinks is constitutive of conscious experience (p. 177–78). It follows that his use of the expression “for-me-ness”, which plays such a central role in Kriegel's motivation of the notion of subjective character as distinguished from qualitative character, is potentially misleading. If what Kriegel calls “for-me-ness” does not essentially involve a presentation of the self or subject, it seems more like an awareness of an awareness, and we have already seen that this falls short of PM.

9 Reductive Accounts of PM

Despite the fact that arguments on behalf of PM fall short, we are inclined to think there is something to the idea that there is a sense of self present in some forms of consciousness, and we are persuaded by pathological problems such as depersonalization, thought insertion and Cotard's syndrome that this sense plays an important role in a normal mental life. We are, however, skeptical of the idea that there is a simple primitive sort of phenomenal me-ness that is a “subjective character” in addition to the qualitative characters of various familiar experiences. Instead, we want to suggest a family of phenomena that can be characterized in more familiar terms that we think are likely to be part of what we are talking about when we talk about “phenomenal me-ness.”

9.1 Sense of Agency

One of the proposals regarding thought insertion is that patients lack a sense of agency regarding those thoughts. This sense of agency applies not only to thoughts but to experience in general. Although many (or even most) sensations are unsolicited, we have a sense of being able to act in response to them and we enjoy a sense of agency with respect to what features of our phenomenal field we attend to. We don't feel paralyzed in the face of experiences. Instead we feel like they present us with

opportunities to exercise the agency that is an implicit feature of our experiential condition.²⁴ This sense of agency might ground a kind of “me-ness” without the presence of an explicit phenomenal feature that represents the self.

9.2 Emotions and Affectivity

Another hypothesis, related to the agency hypothesis, is that the sense of me-ness is partially constituted by the affective valence of experiential states. Our experiences are not merely indifferent flashes on a mental screen. They invite us to act, attend and respond.

Proust follows others, such as Damasio (1994, 1999), in arguing that this affective element of experience provides a sense of me-ness:

A plausible hypothesis is that the feature of the reafferences that carries the implicit reflective value of mineness is a specific emotional marker: Only perception-cum-emotion can trigger the appropriate motivation to respond to the world in a self relevant way without the need for a representation of self. In this light, the sense of subjectivity can be seen as a primitive metacognitive feeling, analogous to a feeling of knowing. This feeling applies to bodily states, as well as to thoughts and experiences. It allows the organism to distinguish, on the basis of the reafferences, what ‘concerns itself,’ that is, how the affordances present in the environment relate to its own fitness. (Proust 2006: 102)

Affective responses do constitute an element within the phenomenal field, and as Proust suggests, such responses or evaluations might implicate the self without explicitly representing the self, insofar as they reflect a primitive form of mattering or having significance for the subject.

9.3 Perspectives and Affordances

Subjects perceive the world from a spatial perspective. When we look at an apple we don't see the whole apple, we see only the side that faces us. We know, however, that the apple has a backside. As we move through the world the perspectives, but not the objects, change. All of this seems to point back to a perceiver. Merleau-Ponty seems to have something like this in mind when he says:

Sensation can be anonymous only because it is incomplete. ...When I see an object, I always feel that there is a portion of being beyond what I see at this moment, not only as regards visual being but also as regards what is tangible or audible. ... In a corresponding way, I am not myself wholly in these operations, they remain marginal. They occur out in front of me, for the self which sees or the self which hears is in some way a specialized self, familiar with only one sector of being and it is precisely for this reason that eye and hand are able to guess the

²⁴ O'Brien (2007) builds a sophisticated account of self-reference and basic self-knowledge around this idea.

movement which will fix the perception, thus displaying that foreknowledge which gives them involuntary appearance. {Merleau-Ponty 1994, p.215}

This “for-me-ness” does not, at least unreflectively, seem to us to be a matter of sensations or experiences. The world itself points back to us. This is a likely source of the implicit sense of self-awareness.

The world doesn't only have spatial perspectives. It also appears as a dynamic field of options that afford opportunities for action. As Gibson famously puts it:

If a terrestrial surface is nearly horizontal (instead of slanted), nearly flat (instead of convex or concave), and sufficiently extended (relative to the size of the animal) and if its substance is rigid (relative to the weight of the animal) then the surface *affords support*. ...It is stand-on-able, permitting an upright position for quadrupeds and bipeds. It is not sink-into-able like a surface of water or a swamp, that is, not for heavy terrestrial animals. (Gibson and James 1979: 127)

In most cases, recognition of these affordances doesn't require any apparent inference or effort at all. It seems to come prereflectively in perception itself, and they appear as affordances for the perceiver. The perception of affordances thus provides at least an implicit form of self-reference. (Bermudez 1998)

Heidegger also remarks on the manner in which the self is prereflectively available due to the way the world presents itself. He suggests that this is how we are most basically self-aware:

Dasein does not first need to turn backward to itself as though, keeping itself behind its own back, it were at first standing in front of things and staring rigidly at them. Instead, it never finds itself otherwise than in the things themselves, and in fact in those things that daily surround it. It finds *itself* primarily and constantly *in things* because, tending them, distressed by them, it always in some way or other rests in things. Each one of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue the things we take care of. ...as the Dasein gives itself over immediately and passionately to the world itself, its own self is reflected to it from things. (Heidegger 1982: 159)

Again, the way the world constantly implicates the subject in her perceptions and actions plausibly provides a sense of me-ness. Since experiences themselves need not be salient (as experiences) it isn't clear that this is what authors mean by PM, but it certainly seems well poised to account for some aspects of phenomenology that the PM theorists describe.

9.4 Peripheral Bodily Awareness

It seems plausible that we constantly have a peripheral awareness of our bodies. Sometimes it is a matter of using the typical five senses: feeling our legs

crossed, looking over our own noses, or feeling our tongues against our bottom teeth. More significant, because more constant, is the feeling we have of our bodies “from the inside.” This includes a sense of our bodily orientation, but also the feeling that comes with the beating of our hearts, the tension in our muscles and the hunger in our bellies. We normally do not attend to these things, but they are there on the periphery creating a background hum in our conscious existence. This provides a constant sort of self-awareness, although it is only occasionally conceptualized as such.

10 Reflection and Ownership

While many of the reductive accounts of phenomenal me-ness help explain how we are in some sense always present to ourselves, they don't necessarily explain part of what it seems the PM theorists want explained. It isn't clear that they explain why phenomenal states present themselves as “mine.” This might lead some philosophers to posit a more primitive sense of PM that accompanies all experiences. We want to suggest a story of me-ness that avoids such a primitive posit.

Our story is ultimately Sartrean in spirit, distinguishing between the way things appear on the pre-reflective level and the way we construe them in reflection. Pre-reflectively there is no phenomenal me-ness. In perception, the transparency theorists are right that our experiences make no appearance; they are exhausted in how they make the world appear to us. Similarly, our pains don't prereflectively have mine-ness. They hurt, and they hurt us, but they don't also contain as part of their phenomenology that it is us that they are hurting. We are inclined to say the same about pre-reflective experiences in general. Of course this doesn't mean that they don't precipitate action. When a pain in my wrist hurts me I grab my wrist. I don't remain indifferent to my sensations. But there is no reason to think that requires something be present in phenomenology that forces us to act in that way. It's not that the question of the relevance of our experiences is answered by something phenomenological. The question doesn't even arise, so there is never any need for an answer.

Despite the fact that experiences on the unreflective level don't have mine-ness, we can gain a sense of mine-ness in reflection. (We can, but we needn't. Even in contemplative moments, the question of “whose thoughts are these” rarely arises.) In reflection we lay claim to our experiences, and the mine-ness is a product—not a condition of—that attitude. We do have a sense of self—partly as a result of the phenomena in the previous section—and we have deeply held background theories about selves and experiences. Among their axioms: experiences must be had by someone; no experience can be had by more than one person; etc. In addition, we have suggested that one of the most basic ways we identify ourselves is by reference to the experiences we are having and the thoughts we are thinking. All this comes together in reflection generating a more robust personalization of the experience. But this personalization is not a phenomenal character of the original experience, it is imposed from without by reflection.

Sartre endorsed this picture in a slightly more tangled manner²⁵:

Contrary to what has been held, therefore, it is on the reflected level that the ego-life has its place, and on the unreflected level that the impersonal life has its place...(Sartre 1993: 58)

And also:

We begin therefore with this undeniable fact: each new state is fastened directly... to the ego, as to its origin. This mode of creation is indeed a creation *ex nihilo*, in the sense that the state is not given as having formerly been in the me.

...Thus the unifying act of reflection fastens each new state, in a very special way, to the concrete totality me. Reflection is not confined to apprehending the new state as attaching to this totality, as fusing with it: reflection intends a relation which traverses time backwards and which gives the me as the source of the state. (Sartre 1993: 77)

Although Sartre talks in terms of the ego, his point is clear: it is in reflection that we find the personalization of consciousness and it is the act of reflecting which does the job.

Interestingly, the Pali-Buddhists can be read as holding something similar. Though they speak (and are often read) in terms of the construction of the self, the act of appropriation sounds a good deal like generation of a personalized consciousness by reflection.

On this hypothesis, the illusion of self will arise through the mechanism of identification. Identification...is the appropriation of mental content to the subject's perspective, such that the content seems to qualify (and hence filter) the very outlook through which the world is approached. To the untrained perspective it will appear as if identification is not constructing, but revealing various aspects of the self's permanent, prior existence. But the bounded self will in fact, on this hypothesis, be constructed through the process of identification. (Albahari 2010:102)

Although they might not put it in such phenomenological terms, meditation can be seen as a way of recovering the pure and impersonal phenomenal field, untainted by the appropriating tendencies of reflection. (Collins 1982: 113–114)

If this picture is right, and it seems to have both plausibility and pedigree, part of the search for PM might be a result of the “refrigerator light illusion”.²⁶ It seems as though there is always this me-ness quality to phenomenal states because it is there whenever we reflect. Through recollecting unreflective moments, however, the transparent and impersonal nature of experience seems more compelling.

²⁵ Indeed, the whole of Sartre's most accessible work, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, could be read as a development of this basic picture.

²⁶ Block 2001. Schear 2009 suggests something similar in criticizing arguments by Zahavi 2005.

11 Conclusion

Although we have been critical of certain appeals to phenomenal me-ness, our intent is not to be dismissive. There is clearly something to the idea that there is PM; too many philosophers and other theorists of the self mention something similar. We are inclined, actually, to think there is more than one thing that is meant by PM. There is also more than one type of argument available for its existence. Naturally we are more sanguine about some claims and arguments than others, but our hope is that by making the arguments more explicit and disambiguating their possible conclusions, it will be easier for both proponents and opponents of PM to contribute to the debate.

To help clarify the dialectic, we have characterized one side of the debate as advocating for the existence of a primitive form of phenomenal me-ness in which there is an element within the phenomenology of experience, perhaps even non-reflective experience, that presents or refers to the self or subject of experience. We found that observations concerning the phenomenology of experience that might seem to advocate for PM do not support anything quite this robust. Arguments based on self-knowledge and self-consciousness, or arguments based on considering various pathologies of consciousness, also seem to fall short. In their place, we have suggested that there are other aspects of normal conscious experience that are not primitive forms of phenomenal me-ness, but that combined with reflection might account for some or all of the sense of self that the notion of phenomenal me-ness is intended to explain.

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