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Mindedness, mindlessness and first-person authority

Whereas the recent exchange between Dreyfus and McDowell has largely highlighted differences in their respective accounts, my focus in the following will be on what I take to be some of their shared assumptions. More specifically, I wish to argue that Dreyfus's frequent reference to mindless coping is partly motivated by his endorsement of a conception of mindedness that is considerably closer to McDowell's view than one might initially have assumed. In a second step, I will discuss to what extent the notions of mindlessness and conceptual mindedness can do justice to the first-personal character of our experiential life. In pursuing this issue, I will at the same time challenge Dreyfus' claim that his position is one with a venerable phenomenological ancestry.

1. Mindless coping

In his APA presidential address, Dreyfus rejects the claim that perception is conceptual all the way out, and argues that we have to make room for the non-conceptual embodied coping skills that we share with pre-linguistic infants and higher animals (Dreyfus 2005, 47). In making this claim, Dreyfus specifically targets McDowell and argues that the latter's showdown with the Myth of the Given entails an endorsement of what Dreyfus labels the Myth of the Mental (2005, 52), which for Dreyfus amounts to the view that all intelligibility is conceptual in nature. One question that immediately arises is why Dreyfus has chosen this specific label. Why not rather talk of the Myth of the Conceptual or – to acknowledge the Merleau-Pontian background of the criticism – the Myth of Intellectualism? Contrary to what might perhaps be the initial assumption, the label Myth of the Mental isn't meant to suggest that McDowell's conception of the mental is mistaken or flawed. What Dreyfus objects to, isn't the conception per se, but rather the idea that the mind, thus defined, has as central and pervasive a role to play in our engagement with the world as McDowell thinks. As Dreyfus writes, the idea that our embodied coping is permeated with mindedness is a mentalistic myth that is untrue to the phenomenon. In reality, the contents possessed by our embodied skills are not only non-conceptual, non-propositional, non-linguistic and non-rational. They are also non-mental (Dreyfus 2007a, 352). Dreyfus even goes so far as to declare mindedness the enemy of our pervasive mindless absorbed coping (2007a, 353). He also speaks of subjectivity as the lingering ghost of the mental, and denies that there is any immersed or implicit ego in absorbed coping. Indeed, in total absorption one ceases to be a subject altogether (2007b, 373). Thus, our immersed bodily life is so completely and totally world-engaged, that it is entirely oblivious to itself. It is only when this bodily absorption is interrupted that something like self-consciousness emerges. Dreyfus doesn't deny the existence of self-consciousness, but he definitely wants to see it as a capacity that is only exercised or actualized on special occasions. When that happens, I retroactively attach an "I think" to the coping. Moreover, although Dreyfus doesn't deny that we have the capacity to step back and reflect, we cannot on his view exercise this capacity without disrupting our coping and radically transform the kind of affordances that are given to it (Dreyfus 2005, 61, 2007a, 354).¹

So far, Dreyfus seems to be equating mindedness, mindfulness and the mental with a form of reflective or self-monitoring rationality (Dreyfus 2007b, 373), and to distinguish this from a kind of mindless *experiencing* (2007a, 364). In other places, however, Dreyfus likens absorbed coping to an airport radio whose beacon doesn't give a warning signal unless the plane strays off course. And as he then writes, "when the pilot is on the beam there is no experience at all" (Dreyfus 2007a, 358). As long as everything goes smoothly there is only silent guidance. It is only deviation that occasions a warning signal, and it is this signal that is then registered experientially. As Dreyfus puts it, a copier must have the capacity to enter a monitoring stance if the brain sends an alarm signal that something is going wrong (Dreyfus 2007b, 374).

When reading statements like these, and when comparing them to places where Dreyfus writes that consciousness is only called into action once the brain has detected something gone wrong (2007b, 377), that features of the environment that are available to the perceptual system needn't be available to the mind (Dreyfus 2005, 54), and that adults, infants and animals in their direct dealing with affordances can cope without thinking at all simply by taking "input energy" and processing it appropriately (Dreyfus 2005, 49, 56), one gets the impression that the relevant processing takes place non-consciously.

The question to ask is consequently whether absorbed coping for Dreyfus involves experience or not? In his contribution to the present volume, Dreyfus' reply is by and large negative. He claims that there is no place for experiential content in absorbed coping and speaks of the possibility of mind-free practical activity (Dreyfus 2010, 8-9*), just as he also refers to the phenomenon of unconscious coping and likens Olympic swimmers, who are performing at their best, to sleepwalkers (Dreyfus 2010, 13*). But this stance inevitable gives rise to the following question: How can one meaningfully speak of a *phenomenology* of mindless coping - as Dreyfus repeatedly does - if the coping is completely unconscious?

Of course, a possible retort could be that it all depends on the kind of phenomenology one has in mind. Consider Dennett's *heterophenomenology* for instance. According to Dennett, heterophenomenology is simply the standard third-person scientific method applied to consciousness. It is *the* scientific way to investigate consciousness, and thus "the way to save the rich phenomenology of consciousness for scientific study" (Dennett 1993a, 50). But as Dennett also says, zombies are not just possible; they are real, since all of us are zombies. If we think we are more than zombies, this is simply due to the fact that we have been misled or bewitched by the defective set of metaphors that we use to think about the mind (Dennett 1993b, 143, 1991, 406). It is important not to misunderstand Dennett at this point. He is not arguing that nobody is conscious. Rather he is claiming that consciousness does not have the first-person phenomenal properties it is commonly thought to have, which is why there is in fact no such thing as actual phenomenology (Dennett 1991, 365). To put it differently, Dennett does recognize that people believe they have experiences, and he considers these facts - the facts about what people believe and express - to be phenomena that any scientific study of the mind must account for (Dennett 1991, 98), but as he then continues, from the fact that people believe that they have experiences, it doesn't follow that they do in fact have experiences (Dennett 1991, 366). The moment that Dennett reaches the conclusion that our commonsense self-ascription of mental states is persistently mistaken, he starts sounding somewhat like Dreyfus. So when Dreyfus advocates a phenomenology of mindless coping, perhaps he is really thinking of a heterophenomenology of mindless coping?

In a recent paper, co-authored with Sean Kelly, Dreyfus has, in fact, engaged directly with Dennett's heterophenomenology. Dreyfus starts out by saying that Dennett's heterophenomenology might be an improvement and better alternative than the phenomenologies of Husserl and Sartre (Dreyfus & Kelly 2007, 47). But eventually Dreyfus expresses two qualms with Dennett's proposal. On the one hand, heterophenomenology attributes beliefs to the subject, but this is unwarranted, since there are no beliefs (in our everyday coping), but merely motor intentionality (Dreyfus & Kelly 2007, 48-49). On the other hand, Dreyfus also claims that heterophenomenology fails to do justice to a certain class of conscious experiences, namely those that aren't beliefs (Dreyfus & Kelly 2007, 51). What kind of experiences does he have in mind? Somewhat surprisingly, Dreyfus writes that a subject must believe or think that he is having a qualitative experience in order to be having it - thus the possession of higher-order beliefs turns out to be a precondition for qualitative experiences -, but as he then continues, there are some conscious intentional experiences that a subject can have without believing that he is having them. In fact, Dreyfus even claims that having these experiences depend on the subject not having a belief about them (Dreyfus & Kelly 2007, 51). Presumably, the idea is that the moment we start having thoughts or beliefs about the experiences, the experiences in question are radically transformed. But given his previous claim, it must also mean that the experiences in question aren't qualitative experiences (since the latter, on his account, do require beliefs). What kind of non-qualitative experiences are we then dealing with? The only further detail that Dreyfus provides us with is that the experiences involve a certain felt or sensed solicitation to act, and that this is a datum of phenomenology (Dreyfus & Kelly 2007, 52-53).² It remains unclear to me why this felt solicitation should lack a qualitative character, but if we disregard this complication, we might conclude that Dreyfus, in some places at least, allows for an experiential dimension to some forms of mindless coping, although he still considers it to lack a first-person character as well as mindedness and subjectivity.

2. Conceptual mindedness

In his reply to Dreyfus, McDowell has argued that embodied coping – in the case of mature human beings – is permeated by mindedness, and that the mind is everywhere in our lives (McDowell 2007a, 339). More specifically he urges us to accept that mindedness is operative in our unreflective thinking and acting and consequently by no means foreign or alien to an immersed bodily life (McDowell 2007b, 370). Indeed, McDowell argues that Dreyfus by taking it for granted that mindedness is detached from bodily life seems to embrace a form of dualism reminiscent of Descartes and to be vulnerable to the Myth of the Disembodied Intellect (McDowell 2007a, 349, 2007b, 369). A crucial question though is what precisely McDowell has in mind when he talks of mindedness. He persistently emphasizes the role of rationality and language, and repeatedly speaks of our conceptual mindedness (McDowell 2007a, 346). McDowell does accentuate the importance of respecting the essential first-person character of acting, but a decisive question is whether the tight link between mindedness, conceptuality and language allows him to account for the first-personal character of consciousness. Let us take a closer look at McDowell's more elaborate account in *Mind and World*.

As is well known, McDowell is out to deny that there is a basic level of non-conceptual experience. In experience one takes in "*that things are thus and so*" (McDowell 1996, 9). McDowell consequently claims that experience already has conceptual content and that conceptual capacities are at work in the experiences themselves (and not just in our judgments based on them) (McDowell 1996, 24). He furthermore argues that it is because experience involves conceptual capacities belonging to spontaneity that experience can count as openness to the layout of reality (McDowell 1996, 26, 47). Elsewhere he defines spontaneity as "a faculty that is exercised in actively self-critical control of what one thinks, in the light of the deliverances of experience" (McDowell 1996, 49). This is obviously a reflective capacity. Indeed, for McDowell, only a self-conscious subject, a subject capable of self-ascribing experiences, can have awareness of an objective world. On McDowell's understanding it is consequently "the spontaneity of the understanding, the power of conceptual thinking, that brings both the world and the self into view" (McDowell 1996, 114). Creatures without conceptual capacities consequently lack both self-consciousness and experience of objective reality.

A succinct presentation of McDowell's guiding idea is provided by Thomas in the following quote:

McDowell's account of concept possession involves both self-consciousness and the capacity for critical reflection. Both of these ideas express the common intuition that the mind must be able to reflect on its own operations, by reflexively applying those operations to itself, if it is to enjoy the full normativity which for McDowell is the essence of mentality (Thomas 1997, 285).

Now, the most common way of discussing the merits of this proposal has been by looking at perception, but as McDowell points out, the Myth of the Given, the idea that there is a non-conceptual experiential intake that can constitute a reason or warrant for believing or judging that such-and-such, is also alive, and perhaps especially so, in the case of inner sense (McDowell 1996, 18, 21). Is our inner experience, our experience of, say, our own sensations (of pain or nausea) and emotions (of fear and anger) also conceptually structured through and through, or is it rather the case that inner experience should fundamentally be understood as a form of non-conceptual acquaintance?

How should we in the first place think of inner experience, how should we understand the relation between the inner experience and that of which it is an experience? One option that McDowell rightfully rejects outright is the idea that inner experience has the same kind of objects as outer experience, except that the object of the inner experience is not very far out (McDowell 1996, 36-7). It is in other words quite misleading to construe the relation between a pain and an experience of pain in the same way as the relation between a chair and a perception of a chair, although "seeing a chair" and "feeling a pain" have the same grammatical structure. McDowell's own proposal is that the objects of "inner experience" are internal accusatives to the awareness that "inner experiences" constitute; they have no existence independently of that (conceptual) awareness (McDowell 1996, 21, 36). But if so, can we at all speak of an awareness-object distinction, and if we cannot, aren't we forced to accept the idea that inner experience is a form of non-conceptual acquaintance? McDowell obviously wants to resist this conclusion, and as far as I understand his argument, this is what it boils down to: For a subject to have an experience of pain, for a subject to be presented with pain in a first-personal mode of presentation, a certain conceptual understanding of what it means to be in pain is required. The subject must understand her being in pain as a particular case of a more general type of state of affairs, "someone's being in pain". She must understand that the pain is not exclusively tied to a first-person and present-tense mode, but that being in pain is something that can also happen to someone else or to oneself at a different time.

Needless to say this conclusion has a number of striking implications. As McDowell admits, it is not just self-critical thinkers who can feel pain. Indeed, it would be outrageous to deny that creatures that lack conceptual capacities can feel pain (McDowell 1996, 22). But given his claim concerning the intimate link between conceptuality and experience, this forces McDowell to introduce a distinction between *experience* on the one hand and *sentience* on the other. And although non-human animals and infants (and for McDowell infants are mere animals, distinctive only in their potential (McDowell 1996, 123)) might feel pain and have sentience, they don't have any (inner or outer) experience (McDowell 1996, 50). Animals and infants can feel pain, but their pain and our pain are two different kinds of pain. By denying that animals and infants have experiences, McDowell is consequently not trying to reduce them to automatons; rather his main aim is to deny that there is a common substratum to non-conceptual sentience and to conceptual experience. Conceptuality is not to be seen as a layer added on top of an existing structure, but as something that radically transforms that pre-existing structure. In a related move McDowell urges us to accept a distinction between proto-subjectivity and full-fledged subjectivity. As he admits, the former notion is precisely introduced in order to permit the ascription of sentience to animals (and infants) (McDowell 1996, 119). Whereas animals and infants might have proto-subjectivity, they don't possess full-fledged subjectivity which involves a conceptually mediated orientation to the world, one that is essentially characterized by freedom and critical distance (McDowell 1996, 116, 119).

On the face of it, there is a tension between McDowell's emphasis of the link between conceptual rationality and critical reflection on the one hand, and his notion of conceptual capacities that are operative in our unreflective embodied coping on the other, but regardless of how he intends to resolve that tension, it should be obvious that infants present a more pressing challenge to McDowell than non-human animals in general. The reason for this is that infants do not remain in a merely animal mode of living; at some point they are transformed into full-fledged subjectivities (McDowell 1996, 125). It is rather urgent to understand how this transformation occurs and how it is possible. We must avoid a two tiered account that leaves us with an unbridgeable dualism between the non-conceptual sentience of the infant and the conceptualized mind of the adult. How does McDowell make the developmental connection between the two intelligible? The answer supplied by McDowell is revealing. He describes the initiation into conceptual capacities as a question of *Bildung*, and argues that the transformation occurs as a result of being initiated into a language (McDowell 1996, 84, 125). Indeed, it is language that for McDowell constitutes the prior embodiment of mindedness (McDowell 1996, 125). As he puts it in the very conclusion of *Mind and World*:

The feature of language that really matters is rather this: that a natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what. The tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it. Indeed, a standing obligation to engage in critical reflection is itself part of the inheritance. [...] But if an individual human being is to realize her potential of taking her place in that succession, *which is the same thing as acquiring a mind*, the capacity to think and act intentionally, at all, the first thing that needs to happen is for her to be initiated into a tradition as it stands (McDowell 1996, 126. My emphasis).

One obvious question to ask is how McDowell intends to explain the very process of language-acquisition, given that he takes infants to be mindless.³ But more importantly, it should be clear that McDowell defends a rather rarefied notion of what mindedness consists in. Would it be one that Dreyfus would oppose? I don't think so. To repeat the point made earlier, in his discussion with McDowell, Dreyfus doesn't propose or offer an alternative conception of the mind and the mental. Rather, his disagreement expresses itself in his defence of the notion of mindless coping. There would be no reason for this choice of term, had Dreyfus not endorsed a conceptualist definition of mind, one that links it to concepts, thoughts and reasons. This is not to say, of course, that there is no important difference between Dreyfus and McDowell, but the main difference is located elsewhere, namely in the question of whether or not mindedness is to be found at the level of absorbed coping.

3. Detectivism and non-objectifying self-acquaintance

A. First-person authority and first-personal givenness

In contrast to both Dreyfus and McDowell, I think there is a perfectly legitimate and quite relevant sense in which copers, infants and various non-human animals are subjects of experience. Moreover, I also think there is a sense in which their experiential lives possess a first-personal character. Even in their case, we need an account that does justice to what McDowell at one point has referred to as the “from within” character of consciousness (McDowell 1998, 377). To put it differently, in contrast to Dreyfus, I think the level of absorbed coping involves a dimension of self-experience – at least in so far as that level is supposed to be experiential rather than simply a matter of non-conscious automaticity – and in contrast to McDowell, I don’t think the self-experience in question requires concepts and language-acquisition.

One way to get at the type of self-experience I am interested in – we might also label it the first-personal character of consciousness or the for-me-ness of experience – is to raise the question regarding first-person authority. When I say “my arm hurts” or “I thought you had forgotten our appointment” or “I plan to work at home tomorrow” it is customary to say that I make such statements with first-person authority. This is not to say that I am infallible, but if people disbelieve me, it is generally because they think that I am insincere rather than mistaken (Finkelstein 2003, 9). On what is such first-person authority based? As Finkelstein has rightly stressed in a recent contribution, we only speak with first-person authority about our *conscious* mental states. We don’t speak with such authority about our un- or non-conscious mental states, even though we might know about them through various indirect means, say, through long conversations with a psychoanalyst or cognitive psychologist. Of course, in so far as we come to know about the states, they are to some extent something of which we become conscious, but that doesn’t make them conscious in the relevant intransitive sense of the term. No, in order for us to speak with first-person authority about a mental state, the mental state must be one we *consciously* live through (Finkelstein 2003, 116).

What is gained by adding the adverb “consciously”? What is the difference between those mental states that remain non-conscious and those that make us consciously aware of objects? A decisive difference is that there is something it is like to consciously perceive, imagine or remember x. Now, on a standard definition of phenomenal consciousness, a mental state is phenomenally conscious if there is something it is like for the subject to be in it. But this necessarily requires the subject to have some awareness of the state in question, although this isn’t supposed to mean that the subject must be aware of the state in the robust sense of noticing or attending to or thinking about the state. In a moment, I will discuss to what extent this proposal represents the orthodox view in phenomenology, but independently of the phenomenological tradition, similar views have recently been defended by Block (2007, 485), Burge (2006, 404-405), Kriegel (2003) and Flanagan (1992). As the latter puts it, consciousness involves self-consciousness in the weak sense that there is something it is like for the subject to have the experience (Flanagan 1992, 194). Picking up on a recent suggestion of Kriegel’s, it might here be helpful to distinguish two types of self-consciousness, a transitive and an intransitive. We might say that a subject is in possession of transitive self-consciousness when “she is conscious of her thought that p or conscious of her perception of x” and in possession of intransitive self-consciousness when “she is consciously thinking that p or consciously perceiving x.” What is the difference between the two types of self-consciousness? Kriegel lists four differences, and claims that whereas the first type is introspective, rare, voluntary and effortful, the second is none of these (Kriegel, 2003, 104). According to Kriegel, the latter type of self-consciousness, intransitive self-consciousness, captures one of the important senses of consciousness. Indeed, intransitive self-consciousness can be seen as a necessary condition for and constitutive feature of phenomenal consciousness. Or to put it differently, a mental state that lacks intransitive self-consciousness is a non-conscious state (Kriegel 2003, 103-106).

If one accepts this line of reasoning, one has a ready answer to the question regarding the basis of first-person authority. I can be first-person authoritative with respect to the mental states I consciously live through because these mental states are characterized by a first-personal, subjective, presence.

This proposal is obviously one that Dreyfus would oppose. In defending his own view of mindless coping, and when denying the first-personal character of our embodied coping, when denying that it is characterized by any form of self-experience or minimal self-awareness (Dreyfus 2007b, 373, 374), Dreyfus makes repeated appeals to what he terms the existential phenomenologists. But is he really right in presenting his position as one with a phenomenological ancestry? I have offered extensive analyses of Husserl’s, Heidegger’s, Sartre’s, Merleau-Ponty’s and Henry’s accounts of self-experience in previous books and articles (see for instance Zahavi 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2005, 2006), so let me here restrict myself to a few references to Sartre and Heidegger.

Sartre famously argues that intentional consciousness is *for-itself* (*pour-soi*), that is, self-conscious. An experience does not simply exist, it exists for itself, i.e., it is given for itself, and this (pre-

reflective) self-givenness is not simply a quality added to the experience, a mere varnish, rather it constitutes the very *mode of being* of the experience. As Sartre writes, “This self-consciousness we ought to consider not as a new consciousness, but as *the only mode of existence which is possible for a consciousness of something*” (Sartre 2003, 9). And as Sartre then adds a bit further in the text, “consciousness is self-consciousness. It is this same notion of *self* which must be studied, for it defines the very being of consciousness” (Sartre 2003, 100). It is consequently important not to conflate the *self*, which Sartre claims is present in pre-reflective experience, with the *ego*, which he takes to be a product of reflection.⁴ In that sense, Dreyfus’ own narrow focus on Sartre’s early work *La transcendance de l’ego* doesn’t give the full picture. One also has to consider the far more elaborate analyses one finds in *L’être et le néant* and in Sartre’s 1948 lecture “Conscience de soi et connaissance de soi.”

In his very first lecture course from 1919, Heidegger addresses the question as to whether every experience contains a reference to an I. Although Heidegger denies that my experiences do contain any explicit reference to an I, he nevertheless insists that the experiences are nevertheless rightly called *my* experiences, and are indeed part of *my* life (Heidegger 1999, 69). The experiences do not simply pass me by, as if they were foreign entities; rather they are precisely *mine* (Heidegger 1999, 75). Thus, whenever I experience something, my self (and Heidegger also prefers to speak of a self rather than of an I, ego or subject) is present, it is so to speak implicated. Thus, the intentional directedness towards... is not to be understood as an intentional experience that only gains a reference to the self afterwards, as if the self would have to turn its attention back upon the first experience with the help of a subsequent second (reflective) experience. Rather, as Heidegger emphasizes on many occasions, the co-disclosure of the self belongs to intentionality as such (Heidegger 1989, 225; 2001, 208).⁵ When we look at concrete experience, we always come across a co-givenness of self and world, and as Heidegger puts it, every worldly experiencing involves a certain component of self-acquaintance and self-familiarity, every experiencing is characterized by the fact that “I am always somehow acquainted with myself” (Heidegger 1993a, 251).⁶⁷

One way to resist this conclusion – a way that Dreyfus might feel appealing – is by embracing a strong version of the intentionalism. Back in 1903, G.E. Moore called attention to the so-called *diaphanous* quality of experience: When you try to focus your attention on the intrinsic features of experience, you always *seem* to end up attending to that *of* which it is an experience (Moore 2003). And as Tye has subsequently argued, the lesson of this transparency is that “*phenomenology ain’t in the head*” (Tye 1995, 151). To discover what it is like to have a certain experience, you must look at what is being intentionally represented. Thus, as the argument goes, experiences do not have intrinsic and non-intentional qualities of their own; rather experienced qualities, the way things phenomenally seem to be, are – all of them – properties the experiences represent things as having (Dretske 1995, 1). Indeed, the reason an experience of a green cucumber is subjectively distinct from an experience of a yellow orange is precisely because different kinds of objects are represented. But if this is the case, one might deny that experiential states or episodes are in any way self-presenting, they do not present me with aspects or dimensions of my own consciousness; rather they are strictly and exclusively world-presenting. Or to rephrase the view with some of Dreyfus’ terms: Initially, there are mindless forms of world-engagement. We only become minded, we only attain mindedness, the moment we start to reflect.

I think there is something right about intentionalism – there is something right in the claim that phenomenal qualities, rather than amounting to some ineffable qualia, have to do with the way in which worldly objects are presented – but ultimately I think the strong transparency thesis operates with too impoverished a notion of phenomenality. Not only has there occasionally been a tendency to focus on the perceptual domain (the loudness of a sound, the smoothness of a surface, the sweetness of a taste, the pungency of a smell), and to forget that it also feels like something to be nervous, angry, fearful, distressed, hungry, tired etc. But more importantly, even if we restrict ourselves to the former range of examples, the dimension of phenomenality is not exhausted by the qualities belonging to the objects of experience. Phenomenality *is* world-presenting but it is *also* self-involving. We need to distinguish as Husserl did between the intentional object in “the how of its determinations” (*im Wie seiner Bestimmtheiten*) and in “the how of its givenness” (*im Wie seiner Gegebenheitsweisen*) (Husserl 1976, 303-304). In short, not only is what it is like to perceive a *green square* subjectively distinct from what it is like to perceive a *red circle*. What it is like to *perceive* a green square is also subjectively distinct from what it is like to *remember* or *imagine* a green square. Moreover, we shouldn’t forget that when I consciously see, remember, know, think, hope, feel or will something, the objects are there *for me* in different modes of givenness (as imagined, perceived, recollected, anticipated etc). It could of course be objected that it is patently implausible to claim that each and every experience is accompanied by a distinct feeling of for-me-ness, i.e., that it simply isn’t true to phenomenology to claim that all my experiences possess the same quale, a common stamp or label that clearly identifies them as mine. But this objection misunderstands the claim being made. Rather than

referring to a specific experiential content, say a quality like yellow, salty or spongy, i.e., rather than referring to a specific *what*, the for-me-ness of experience 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 in a way to me that in principle is unavailable to others.

Does this view amount to a form of *detectivism*, to use the label coined by Finkelstein? No. The suggestion is not that first-person authority is to be explained by means of a kind of inward observation or introspection that allows us to detect or discover the content of our own mind (Finkelstein 2003, 2). The claim is not that experiences are things we perceive or observe and that the relation between an experience and its first-personal givenness (subjective presence) is to be cashed out in terms of an act-object structure. The point is rather that experiential processes are intrinsically self-revealing or self-intimating. This is also why it is better to say that we see, hear or feel *consciously*, instead of saying that there is a perception of an object, and in addition an awareness of the perception. The decisive advantage of the adverbial phrasing is that it avoids interpreting the secondary awareness as a form of object-consciousness. This temptation remains as long as we talk of experiential episodes as episodes *of* which we are conscious.

As we have seen, Sartre and Heidegger both consider a form of self-consciousness to be an integral part of intentional consciousness. They also deny that the self-consciousness in question comes about by means of some additional second-order mental state. To that extent they both reject a *higher-order account* of consciousness according to which the distinction between conscious and non-conscious mental states rests upon the presence or absence of a relevant meta-mental state. In contrast to some recently proposed same-order accounts of consciousness, which follow Brentano in interpreting intransitive self-consciousness as a form of marginal or secondary object-consciousness, Sartre and Heidegger (along with Husserl and Gurwitsch) would deny that the self-givenness of experience involves a subject-object structure (cf. Zahavi 1999a, 2005). They would not only reject the view that a mental state becomes conscious by being taken as an object by a higher-order state, they would also reject the view espoused by Brentano according to which a mental state becomes conscious by taking itself as an object. Brentano and the phenomenologists both share the view that self-consciousness (or to use Brentano's terminology "inner consciousness") differs from ordinary object-consciousness. The issue of controversy is over whether self-consciousness is (i) merely an extraordinary object-consciousness or (ii) not an object-consciousness at all. In contrast to Brentano, the phenomenologists would think the latter, more radical, move is required. In our everyday life, we are absorbed by and preoccupied with projects and objects in the world. Although this necessarily entails that we are (pre-reflectively) aware of our experiences – they are like something to us – we are not aware of them as a succession of internal objects. My pre-reflective access to my experiential life is non-objectifying in the sense that I do not occupy the position or perspective of a spectator or in(tro)spectator on it, which of course is yet another reason why we are not dealing with a form of detectivism.⁸

To exemplify, let us consider the early lecture course *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* from 1919/1920, where we find Heidegger arguing that one of the tasks of phenomenology is to disclose the non-objectifying and non-theoretical self-understanding that belongs to experience as such (Heidegger 1993a, 155-157). Thus, Heidegger clearly acknowledges the existence of a basic self-acquaintance that is part and parcel of experience. And as he repeatedly emphasizes, this self-familiarity does not take the form of a reflective self-perception or a thematic self-observation, nor does it involve any kind of self-objectification. On the contrary, we are confronted with a process of lived self-acquaintance whose distinctive feature is its non-reflective character, and which must be understood as an immediate expression of life itself (Heidegger 1993a, 159, 165, 257-258). In a lecture course given seven years later, Heidegger pursues the same line of thought, and writes:

Dasein, as existing, is there for itself, even when the ego does not expressly direct itself to itself in the manner of its own peculiar turning around and turning back, which in phenomenology is called inner perception as contrasted with outer. The self is there for the Dasein itself without reflection and without inner perception, *before* all reflection. Reflection, in the sense of a turning back, is only a mode of self-*apprehension*, but not the mode of primary self-disclosure (Heidegger 1989, 226).

Just like Sartre, Heidegger would deny that we only gain awareness of our own experiences through reflection. Prior to reflection, our experiential life is not a question of non-conscious automaticity, rather qua experiential life it is precisely self-disclosing. This first-personal self-disclosure is immediate, non-observational, non-inferential and non-objectifying.

B. The power of reflection

Dreyfus consistently interprets self-consciousness as a form of self-monitoring. This is far removed from the idea of an immersed, non-objectifying self-acquaintance that we find in phenomenology. Indeed, it is tempting to criticize Dreyfus for remaining a detectivist, and for having fallen victim to a myth of his own, namely the *Myth of the Spectatorial Subject*. In addition, Dreyfus also claims that the fundamental structures of mindless coping is off limit to any kind of reflective investigation, since he considers the latter a kind of falsifying mirror or telescope that utterly transforms whatever it makes appear. One question to consider is again to what extent this view is in line with views found in classical phenomenology. Another question concerns the methodological impasse it arguably results in.

There is a long tradition in phenomenology for discussing the issue regarding the disclosing vs. producing character of reflection. Most phenomenologists recognized that, rather than merely copying or repeating the original experience, reflection actually transforms it, or as Husserl explicitly admitted, it *alters* it (Husserl 1950, 72, 1987, 89). Husserl spoke of reflection as a process that – in the best of circumstances – discloses, disentangles, explicates, articulates, and accentuates those components and structures that were implicitly contained in the pre-reflective experience (Husserl 1984, 244; 1966a, 129; 1966b, 205, 236).

I think one should view the phenomenological position as being situated between two extremes. On one hand, we have the view that reflection merely copies or mirrors pre-reflective experience faithfully; on the other, the view that reflection distorts lived experience irredeemably. The middle course is to recognize that reflection involves both a gain and a loss. For most phenomenologists, reflection is constrained by what is pre-reflectively lived through; it is answerable to experiential facts and is not constitutively self-fulfilling. But at the same time, they recognized that reflection qua thematic self-experiences does not simply reproduce the lived experiences unaltered, and that this may be precisely what makes reflection cognitively valuable. Reacting against a direct attack on phenomenology that Natorp articulated in his 1912 book *Allgemeine Psychologie* – an attack that basically consisted in the claim that the phenomenological method is incapable of capturing the experiential structures in their pretheoretical immediacy, since the reflective method employed is not only theoretical and objectifying, but also one making use of generalizing and subsuming concepts that merely estranges us from experience itself (this all sounds somewhat like Dreyfus) – Heidegger maintained that the phenomenological articulation and conceptualization of life-experience is something that belongs to life itself; it is not something that is imposed on life arbitrarily from without, as if the conceptualization were driven merely by certain epistemological or foundational concerns. A true phenomenological description does not constitute a violation, is not an attempt to impose a foreign systematicity on life, rather it is something that is rooted in and motivated by factic life-experience itself (Heidegger 1994, 87, 1993a, 59). As Heidegger writes in the lecture course *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles* from 1921/22:

The categories are nothing invented, no 'framework' or independent society of logical schemata; they are rather in an originary fashion *in life itself of life*; of life, in order to 'cultivate' it. They have their own mode of access which, however, is not such as would be foreign to life itself, imposed upon it arbitrarily from without, rather it is just the eminent way in which *life comes to itself* (Heidegger 1994, 88).

Life is comprehensible because it always spontaneously expresses itself, and because experiencing is itself a preliminary form of understanding, is itself what might be called a pre-understanding (Heidegger 1993b, 166). Thus, Heidegger basically argues that there is an intimate connection between *experience*, *expression*, and *understanding* (Heidegger 1993b, 169). It is also in this context that Heidegger speaks of philosophy as a continuation of the reflexivity found in (experiential) life (Heidegger 1993b, 156). In other words, for Heidegger phenomenology must build on the familiarity that life already has with itself; it must draw on the persistent care of self that is build into the very life stream.

Rather than simply distorting lived experience, our articulation of it might, at best, simply be accentuating structures already inherent in it. This is not to say that reflection does not contain the potential for error and distortion, but as long as reflection is imbued with a self-critical awareness of precisely such dangers, reflection retains its value. Moreover, the claim that reflection necessarily falsifies lived experience and that they elude it completely is one we should avoid. As Husserl already pointed out in his discussion with H.J. Watt in §79 of *Ideen I*, such a sceptical claim is ultimately self-refuting. The problem is obviously that in order to argue that reflection falsifies lived experience, you have to have some other access to the very same lived experiences, an access that allows you to compare them to what reflection presents us with. Otherwise your sceptical claim is utterly empty. But how are you to obtain such access, how are you to

scrutinize the lived experience in order to allow for a comparison if not through some form of reflection (Husserl 1976, §79)?

To put it differently, how does Dreyfus know that reflection falsifies lived experience? How does he know that it is a myth that reflection makes something implicit explicit (Dreyfus 2007a, 360)? Moreover, how do we on Dreyfus' account make the level of absorbed coping accessible for phenomenological investigation and description? Given his own restrictions, it can hardly be based on a reflection, nor for that matter can it be based on the verbal reports of interviewed subjects, since those verbal reports are considered retroactive rationalization, i.e., post-hoc fabrications. Is it then a question of inference to best explanation of behavioural data? If so, it is hard to see why Dreyfus' account should merit the label "phenomenological".⁹

4. Higher-order theories

So far, I have argued that Dreyfus' reference to mindless coping must be seen in the context of his endorsement of a conception of mindedness not unlike McDowell's. I have shown that Dreyfus' attempt to bolster his account of mindlessness by reference to existential phenomenology is quite problematic.¹⁰ Not only do Sartre and Heidegger endorse a notion of an immersed, non-objectifying self-acquaintance which is very different from the alternative between unconscious coping and observational self-monitoring allowed for by Dreyfus, but it also remains quite unclear to what extent Dreyfus is able to offer a phenomenology of skilful coping given his categorical distrust of reflection. Dreyfus' relatively positive appraisal of Dennett's heterophenomenology is in this context revealing. The outcome of all of this is a decisive lacuna in Dreyfus' account. It is not doing justice to the first-personal character of experience. Paradoxically, I think one of the problems is that Dreyfus isn't sufficiently radical in his rejection of Cartesianism. The right way to counter Cartesianism is not to do what Dreyfus has done, namely to accept its definitions of subjectivity and experience and then to argue that we need to get rid of both. No, the right way to counter it is by proposing an alternative and better understanding of what experience and subjectivity amount to, which is precisely what the phenomenologists have been doing. In short, I am not persuaded by Dreyfus' appeal to mindlessness. But what then about McDowell's notion of mindedness?

McDowell's denial that one can have experiences as of an inner or outer world in the absence of concepts (McDowell 1996, 50) is reminiscent of the Strawsonian idea that one cannot be said to have a subjective perspective unless one possesses a certain understanding of the objectivity-condition, an understanding that environmental objects persist independently of the experiential perspective we bring to bear on them. The obvious question to ask, however, is whether the requirements that must be met in order to recognize an experience as subjective or categorize it as inner is identical to the requirements that must be met in order to simply have experiences; experiences that are essentially and by necessity characterized by what Kriegel terms intransitive self-consciousness, and what other thinkers have called "pre-reflective self-consciousness," "first-personal givenness," "for-me-ness of experience," "subjective presence," "self-intimation," or "reflexiveness" (to use a term recently favored by Burge).

McDowell can of course decide to reserve the word "experience" for something that involves the actualization of conceptual capacities (McDowell 1998b, 410), but this merely highlights the fact that the discussion can easily derail into a terminological dispute. And indeed, not only do different people employ different terms to designate one and the same phenomenon but one and the same term, be it "self-consciousness", "for-me-ness of experience" or "first-personal givenness", has definitely also been used to designate quite different phenomena.

Let me – in the face of some recent criticism (cf. Lyyra 2009, Prætorius 2009, Schear 2009) – try to be as clear as possible about what I mean when I talk of the first-personal givenness or for-me-ness of experience. I don't mean a self-reference by means of the first-person pronoun, in fact, I don't mean a linguistically conditioned self-reference at all. Nor do I have an explicit or thematic kind of self-knowledge in mind, one involving an awareness of oneself as a distinct individual, different from other individuals. No, I am simply referring to the self-presentational character of phenomenal consciousness. As I see it, we have three options. We can 1) endorse a radical version of the transparency thesis and argue that phenomenality is strictly and exclusively world-presenting, i.e., when consciously scrutinizing the lotto coupon or when consciously admiring a portrait, we are *de facto* self- and mind-blind. If we deny this and concede that the experiential episodes (the perceiving, the admiring, the hoping, fearing etc.) are also given when consciously lived through, the obvious question is how, i.e., in what manner. We can then either claim 2a) that they are given in the same way as public objects (i.e., in a way that is equally accessible to a variety of subjects) or we can claim 2b) that they are given in a distinct way, with a distinct subjective presence, to the subject whose experiential episodes they are, a way that in principle is unavailable to others. When saying distinct,

the claim is not that the subject of the experience is explicitly aware of their distinct character; the point is not that the subject is necessarily attending to the distinctness in any way. But experiential givenness differs from objectual givenness even before, say, a child becomes explicitly aware of this difference. In my view, 2b is the only admissible option if one is serious about wanting to do justice to the “from within” character of consciousness. I obviously don’t think that first-personal givenness in and by itself amounts to authoritative first-person knowledge (or critical self-deliberation), and I am not trying to obliterate the difference between the two, but I think the former is a necessary prerequisite for the latter. I consequently don’t think we will be in position to explain the latter unless we acknowledge the former. And it is entirely unclear to me how this subjective presence, this self-presentational or reflexive feature – something that Husserl explored in great detail in his lectures on the phenomenology of inner time-consciousness – could be conditioned by and dependent upon concepts and language.¹¹

There is, of course, one proposal on the market that purports to offer an explanation of why experience requires thoughts, concepts and language. Indeed, this is precisely what one version of the higher-order thought theory in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind is all about. But since the defenders of this view typically bite the bullet and deny phenomenal consciousness to creatures that lack the capacity for higher-order thoughts,¹² I take it that this is not McDowell’s view. In fact, McDowell doesn’t seem particularly interested in the character of phenomenal consciousness in the first place, rather his main concern is with the question of how experience can rationally constrain and justify our beliefs and thoughts. His claim is that it can only do so, if it already has conceptual content, and even if it should turn out that our experiential life possesses a form of pre-reflective self-consciousness, for-me-ness or first-personal givenness that doesn’t depend on language and concepts, he might deem it irrelevant, since it on his view would have no bearing on the issue he is concerned with.

Another slightly different way of presenting McDowell’s take is as follows: If we for a moment set aside his preference for a different terminology, perhaps McDowell could concede that animals and other non-language using creatures do have some kind of mind, and that their experiential life is characterized by some form of first-personal givenness, but he might then insist that it is a decisive mistake to equate and identify that first-personal givenness with the first-personal givenness characterizing the experiential life of competent language users.¹³ Indeed, he might want to argue that the two have no common denominator, no shared core. Just like dye mixed with water, leaves no water uncoloured, concepts and language are not merely layers on top of a pre-existing structure, rather they radically transform that structure. Given such a view, one might again reach the same conclusion: Even if some form of pre-linguistic first-personal givenness exists, it is of no significance if our aim is to do justice to human consciousness.¹⁴

Is this line of thought convincing? I think not, and here are two reasons.

1. Let us grant that our rational capacities pervasively shape our experience, let us grant that we experience the world and ourselves differently because of the conceptual capacities we have. If we grant this, would it then be misguided to search for a common core, a commonality, between our experiential life and the sentient life of infants and non-human animals? We should not make the mistake of overlooking the difference between the *what* and the *how* of experience, between the *content* and the *mode* or *form* of presentation. What we experience might well be different, but that doesn’t show that the basic structure of first-personal givenness is also different. Indeed, if, as Sartre and many other phenomenologists insist, pre-reflective self-consciousness is an integral and constitutive feature of phenomenal consciousness – for my own more extensive defence of this thesis, cf. Zahavi 1999a, 2005 – then it is difficult to see why that shouldn’t hold for experiences that are conceptually structured as well.
2. Even if it could be argued that there is no commonality between the proto-subjectivity of animals and infants and the full-fledged subjectivity of those humans who have been initiated into a language (neither when it comes to the content nor when it comes to the mode or form), even if it could be argued that there is no commonality between the non-conceptual self-disclosing character of consciousness and conceptualized self-experience, I don’t see how one can deny that the former constitutes a necessary condition of possibility for the latter. The former might not be sufficient for the latter, it might not in and of itself justify our first-person beliefs, but without it nothing like the latter would ever be possible. But if this is so, I don’t see how a satisfactory account of conceptualized mindedness can permit itself to ignore it. By the same token, however, one would also have to concede that an exploration of this basic but fundamental dimension of our experiential life doesn’t capture that which is distinctive about human consciousness.

It is clear that McDowell is far more interested in the normative dimension of the mind than in its phenomenal character. But whereas I find it both justifiable and commendable to emphasize the importance of rationality and self-critical thinking when discussing the nature of mind, I also think we need to consider phenomenology and account for the dimension of lived subjectivity. It is precisely an exploration of this dimension that I find wanting in the accounts provided by Dreyfus and McDowell.¹⁵

NOTES

¹ One can detect a certain tension in Dreyfus' account. On the one hand, he frequently refers to experts such as Israeli fighter aces, Olympic athletes or chess masters when exemplifying mindless coping, but he also argues that one of the virtues of his account is that it can accommodate the non-conceptual coping skills we share with pre-linguistic infants and higher animals. The tension consequently has to do with the question of whether the mindless coping that Dreyfus wants to call attention to is one where concepts no longer play any role – although they did play a role when the skill was initially acquired – or whether he rather wants to make the more radical claim that skillful coping is more basic than – and ultimately constitutes the basis for – conceptual rationality. I take it that he wants to claim both, but it is problematic to use examples taken from chess play or aeronautics as support of the more radical claim.

² Elsewhere, however, he writes that we in skillful coping “experience the situation as drawing the movements out of *us*” (Dreyfus 2002, 380. My emphasis). If this is a correct phenomenological description, it reintroduces and includes a crucial element of self-reference.

³ For some recent account, which highlights the importance of joint attention, see Tomasello 1999 and Hobson 2002.

⁴ As Sartre writes, “Finally we succeeded in getting rid of the pure unreflective consciousness of the transcendental “I” which obscured it and we showed that selfness, the foundation of personal existence, was altogether different from an Ego or from a reference of the Ego to itself. There can be, therefore, no question of defining consciousness in terms of a transcendental egology. In short, consciousness is a concrete being *sui generis*, not an abstract, unjustifiable relation of identity. It is selfness and not the seat of an opaque, useless Ego” (Sartre 2003, 263).

⁵ In a recent article, Okrent has argued that Heidegger is committed to the view that one cannot intend anything as ready-to-hand unless one also intends oneself as “that for the sake of which” one engages in the kind of activity in which one engages. He then claims that this self-directed form of intentionality plays the same structural role in Heidegger's thought as the “I think” does in Kant (Okrent 2007, 162).

⁶ In his contribution to the present volume, Dreyfus concedes that Heidegger has his own understanding of the self as pervasive and always operative, and that even absorbed coping, on Heidegger's account, is pervaded by “mineness”. However, Dreyfus insists that this has nothing to do with the presence of some form of (even marginal) self-awareness. In fact, Dreyfus opts for what might be called a non-experiential reading of “mineness,” and argues that it should be interpreted as the manner in which my individual style of life structures the way I am solicited by the world (Dreyfus 2010, 8*). Dreyfus' focus is on *Sein und Zeit*, but as indicated above (and see also Zahavi 2003b), the claim that Heidegger's account of self and “mineness” has nothing to do with self-awareness is quite hard to reconcile with what Heidegger's is saying in the lecture courses preceding *Sein und Zeit*.

⁷ Due to limitations of space, I cannot pursue the question of Merleau-Ponty's view in detail, but here are a few quotes from *Phénoménologie de la perception* that are supposed to challenge Dreyfus's reading: “Consciousness is neither the positing of oneself, nor ignorance of oneself, it is *not concealed* from itself, which means that there is nothing in it which does not in some way announce itself to it, although it does not need to know this explicitly” (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 296). “Behind the spoken *cogito*, the one which is converted into discourse and into essential truth, there lies a tacit *cogito*, myself experienced by myself” (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 403). “The fact that even our purest reflection on the flux is actually inserted into that flux, shows that the most precise consciousness of which we are capable is always, as it were, affected by itself or given to itself, and that the word consciousness has no meaning independently of this duality” (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 426).

⁸ In addition, it could be argued that I not only *do* not occupy an objectifying attitude vis-a-vis my experiences, but that I *cannot* pre-reflectively occupy such a position, if the experiences in question are to be given as *my* experiences (cf. Zahavi 2004a).

⁹ For some related worries, see Thompson 2007, 315-317.

¹⁰ Let me add that I find Dreyfus' distinction between a (Husserlian) pure and transcendental phenomenology on the one hand and a (Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontian) existential phenomenology on the other quite problematic (see Zahavi 2004b, 2008a, 2008b).

¹¹ For a related argument to the effect that experiential qualities are self-manifesting or self-presenting and that this entails that they given non-objectifying and non-conceptually, see Poellner (2003)

¹² Carruthers, for instance, holds that only creatures that are in possession of a *theory of mind* are capable of enjoying conscious experiences or of having mental states with phenomenal feels (Carruthers 1996, 158), and he consequently argues that animals (and children under the age of three) are blind to the existence of their own mental states; there is in fact nothing it is like for them to feel pain or pleasure (Carruthers 1998, 216, 2000, 203). Carruthers' position is extreme, though by no means unique. For similar views, see Gallup (1982, 1985) and Prinz (2003). For a criticism of higher-order representational accounts, see Zahavi 1999a, 2004a, 2005.

¹³ Consider, for comparison, Baker's distinction between weak and strong first-person phenomena (Baker 2000, 60, 67).

¹⁴ For the very same reason, McDowell might, of course, also object to the suggestion made earlier, namely that first-personal authority is somehow based or grounded on experiential first-personal givenness. I don't have time on this occasion to discuss McDowell's conceptualism in more detail. Let me just add, however, that there are intriguing similarities and differences between his account and the one found in Husserl. To give just one example, consider that Husserl in *Ideen II* writes that a consideration of the development of the personal ego calls for a distinction between two levels of subjectivity. There is a lower level of "pure" animality, and a higher spiritual level that is home to all proper acts of reason. Husserl then writes that this distinction is linked to the distinction between reason and sensibility. And as he then continues "the latter also has its rules, and indeed its intelligible rules of harmony and discord; it is a stratum of *hidden reason*" (Husserl 1952, 276).

¹⁵ Thanks to Thor Grünbaum, Erik Rietveld, Charles Siewert and Morten Sørensen Thaning for detailed comments to an earlier version of the paper.

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