



I AM MINE: FROM PHENOMENOLOGY OF SELF-AWARENESS TO METAPHYSICS OF SELFHOOD

Abstract: *I aim to show that, contrary to standard deflationary or eliminativist theories of the self, we can argue from the phenomenology of pre-reflective self-awareness for the thesis that subjects of experience are substances. The phenomenological datum of subjectivity points to a specific metaphysical structure of our experience, that is, towards the substance view rather than the bundle or the minimal self view. Drawing on modern philosophical accounts of pre-reflective self-awareness, mineness and (self-) acquaintance, I will argue that a subject is aware of being the one individual who has many experiences and that it is revealed to the subject that it is the bearer of experiences and their unifier. The subject is present in pre-reflective awareness and known as the subject of experiences, and even this minimal self-awareness gives us reason to favour the substance view. Thus, one can demonstrate how the debates on the phenomenology of pre-reflective self-awareness and the metaphysics of selfhood intersect.*

Keywords: *Pre-reflective self-awareness, substance, bundle, self, subject of experience.*

How adequate unto itself
Its properties shall be
Itself unto itself and none
Shall make discovery —
Adventure most unto itself
The Soul condemned to be —
Attended by a single Hound
Its own identity.

This Consciousness that is aware, Emily Dickinson

1. Introduction

When it comes to answering the question of the nature of selfhood, most contemporary philosophers of mind have gravitated towards deflationary and eliminativist accounts.¹ As a response to such strategies, I will put forward phenomenological arguments for the claim that the self is a substance. I aim to

1 Even those who are sympathetic to non-physicalist accounts of consciousness are deflationists about selves and subjectivity. See Strawson (2009), Chalmers (2015). For a *no-self* view, read Metzinger (2003).

provide arguments from the phenomenology² of pre-reflective self-awareness for the thesis that the subject of experience is a kind of substance – that the phenomenological situation points to a specific metaphysical structure of our experience in favour of the substance view.³ If a subject is pre-reflectively aware of being the one individual who has many experiences (it is revealed to the subject that it is the bearer of experiences, their unifier and individuator), then this goes to show that the subject is, indeed, a substance. I will discuss if all the conditions for this can be satisfied in the course of the paper. It will be argued that the debates on the phenomenology of pre-reflective self-awareness and the metaphysics of subject/self are closely related.

The overall plan of the paper is the following. In Section 2, I will present the main competing metaphysical theories of selfhood. In Section 3, I survey modern conceptions of subjectivity and mineness, showing what the best theories of pre-reflective self-awareness are and how subjectivity affords us self-acquaintance needed to defend the substantial nature of subjects. Section 4 presents arguments that we are plausibly acquainted with ourselves as subjects and that we have self-acquaintance. Section 5 discusses the “bundle” theory of the self, and Section 6 “the minimal self” theory of Zahavi. Section 7 is dedicated to the phenomenological defence of the substance view of the self, based on the findings from previous sections.

2. Theories of the self

Which theories of the self are on the metaphysical table? There are two traditional camps: the substance theory and the bundle theory of the self. I will add a third, recent position – the minimal/phenomenal self. We can define these three main categories of metaphysical theories about experiencing subjects (selves) in the following manner.

If the self is understood as a bundle (*The Bundle View*), a subject is individuated by experiences (identity conditions of persons are specified in

2 Here, I do not refer to the Phenomenological tradition and philosophical method but to the phenomenality of experience, the “what-it’s-likeness” of experiences (and the subjectivity of experience), though many crucial ideas on the nature of pre-reflective self-awareness come from phenomenologists like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Michel Henry.

3 Thesis that experiencing subjects are bearers of experiential properties in which they are instantiated should not be a trivial claim. Nida-Rümelin (2017, 56) warns of this possible trivialization and shows that it comes from a simple argument from instantiation. Such an argument doesn’t do justice to the philosopher’s claims about experiencing subjects. It is not enough to infer from the truth that an experience is an instantiation of an experiential property in something, that “something” must be an experiencing subject. The truth about the subject being a bearer of experiential properties has to come from reflection on the nature of subjects and experiential properties. And we can only know something about the nature of experiences from our phenomenology. So, the fact that we are after a different solution gives more weight to the argument of this paper.

terms of relations between mental states) which are psychological modes – the subject is just experiences and their relations; selves are collections of properties. (e.g., Hume, 1978; Parfit, 1984; Dainton, 2008).⁴ Selves reduce to experience.

In case the self is a kind of “minimal subject” (*The Minimal View*), it is identical with the *subjectivity* (with a *feature*) of experience. For example, Dan Zahavi (2014) defends *experiential minimalism* in which the *for-me-ness* or *first-personal givenness* dimension/aspect of phenomenal consciousness is the *minimal experiential self*. He is explicit on this: “More precisely, the claim is that the (minimal or core) self possesses experiential reality and that it can be identified with the ubiquitous first-personal character of the experiential phenomena” (Zahavi 2014, 18). This modern approach is a descendant of theories from the Phenomenological tradition. The “minimal/thin” theories are deflationist about the self and have some similarities with the bundle view.⁵

What does it mean to say that the subject of experience is a *substance*? It would be to claim that an experiential subject is a kind of metaphysical entity that acts as a bearer of experiential properties, upon which experiential properties are instantiated, and is not itself a property (e.g., P.F. Strawson, 1959; Chisholm, 1969; Lowe, 1996; Nida-Rümelin, 2018). It is that which endures among many changing experiences. Hence, the instantiations of experiential properties in subjects are types of events, namely *experiences*. For the subject involved, it is like something to undergo the experience because experiential properties are such that there is something it is like to have them.

If the self or subject is a substance (*The Substance View*), it metaphysically unifies and individuates experiences (experiential properties) as their bearer. Lowe writes (1996, 9): “selves or persons as *substances* — that is, as enduring

4 A modern variant of the bundle theorist is dynamical *self-organization*. See Metzinger (2003, 2011).

5 Galen Strawson’s (2009) *sesmet* theory of self (*sesmet* being the acronym for “subject-of-experience-as-single-mental-thing”) could also be called *thin self theory*, with the difference being that the experiential self is *diachronically* persistent in Zahavi’s account. Guillot (2017, section 3.5.2) discusses minimalism about the self: “the self, or at least a form of selfhood (the “minimal self” or “core self”), is identical either with experience, or with some part or intrinsic property of experience”, citing Zahavi and Williford (2015) as proponents, while saying that Strawson’s view “bears a resemblance to this type of minimalism”. The case of Strawson’s *sesmet* seems to be peculiar. Strawson holds that selves are objects (2009, 298) because of their “strong unity”, though he is distancing himself from the traditional notion of an individual substance. With every experience there is a subject of experience, experiencing involves a subject, and this is a metaphysical and a phenomenological claim for him. Sometimes he claims that there is an identity between the subject and experience. In a sense, Strawson could be understood as claiming that selves are substances (in a new, more relaxed sense of *substance/object*), though not enduring substances. If this is the case, his theory would belong in the first category. I do not have the space to analyze Strawson’s view in more detail.

bearers of successive states and in no way reducible to mere successions of those states”.

Experiencing subjects are fundamental.⁶ With these metaphysical theories in mind, we can now turn to the phenomenology of subjectivity in the endeavour to properly understand what has broadly been called *the subjective character* of consciousness (and other key notions found in these debates, like those of *self-awareness* and *mineness*). Self-consciousness can be understood in many ways, but we need the fundamental type, *pre-reflective self-awareness*, the best candidate for the type of awareness that provides a grasp of the nature of the experiencing subject. When we arrive at a clearer understanding of what pre-reflective self-awareness is, then we need to show that acquaintance and self-acquaintance are possible and, thus a way to the nature of the experiencing subject.

3. Self-awareness and mineness

It has become common in contemporary analytical philosophy of mind to hold that consciousness has a *subjective* as well as a *qualitative* aspect, that there is a difference between what an experience is like and it's being like something for its subject (e.g., Levine, 2001; Kriegel, 2009).⁷ This subjective dimension of consciousness has been understood in different ways by different philosophers. This side or aspect is sometimes called *for-me-ness*, *me-ness*, *mineness*, *first-personal givenness* or simply *subjectivity*.⁸ *Mineness* and *subjective character* are sometimes meant to stand-in for the *pre-reflective self-consciousness* of the phenomenological tradition. Many phenomenologists and philosophers of mind maintain that something like self-consciousness in the pre-reflective and pre-conceptual sense exists. This

6 E. J. Lowe held “the ownership view”, and has argued against neo-Humean and neo-Lockean theories of personal identity, though he did this from a proper grasp of one’s self-knowledge. In *Subjects of experiences* he concluded that: “The self must be conceived of as having the status of a substance vis-a-vis its thoughts and experiences – they are ‘adjectival’ upon it (are ‘modes’ of it, in an earlier terminology), rather than it being related to them rather as a set is to its members.” (Lowe 1996, 195). “Property-instances are ontologically dependent entities, depending for their existence and identity upon the individual substances which they characterize, or to which they ‘belong’” (Lowe 2006, 27). It can be noted that Lowe found the doctrine of ‘bare particularity’, that there is a ‘substratum’ or ‘bare particular’ supporting property-instances, indefensible. He maintained that the modes belong to the individual substance itself. “I contend that modes are ‘particular ways objects are’, and as such are ontologically dependent upon objects in a much stronger sense than, according to a trope theorist, any trope can be ontologically dependent upon other tropes in a bundle of compossible tropes” (Lowe 2006, 97). For more on substances and bundles, see Lowe (1998, 2006).

7 From Nagel (1974) to Zahavi (2014); two *dimensions* of experience.

8 Also, *inner awareness* (Kriegel, 2009; Farrell and McClelland, 2017).

feature of consciousness is also called *pre-reflective self-awareness*.⁹ The self-awareness in question is not of the cognitive kind, deployed in I-thoughts, but minimal, non-reflexive.

Now, mineness could be a misleading term. Are experiences phenomenally presented as mine? One will not, perhaps, find any feature or property of the experience, a stamp or a mark, that would say that *it is mine*. Even if there is such a feature in phenomenal consciousness, does it commit one to the existence of a subject of experience? There is much imprecise talk when the matter of subjectivity is concerned. Some of the confusion behind the use of such notions was cleared by the work of Siewert (2013), Nida-Rümelin (2014, 2017) and Guillot (2017). They have shown how we should work towards developing better and more accurate concepts based on our phenomenology.

We need to be careful when using the umbrella term “subjective character” because it can designate essentially very different things. Nida-Rümelin (2014, 2017) shows there are three interpretations of “subjective character”: *basic intentionality*, *primitive awareness* and *awareness of basic intentionality*. What she calls *awareness of basic intentionality* is *pre-reflective self-awareness*. She argues that awareness of basic intentionality cannot have the structure of basic intentionality and is not itself experiencing.

Philosophers of consciousness since the Phenomenological tradition have pointed out that there is something special about pre-reflective self-awareness. Such awareness is very hard to pin down. It is such that a subject is never an object in its own stream of consciousness. It is not as if one is turning “the mind’s eye” inward. Nida-Rümelin (2014) would say that the awareness of basic intentionality (self-awareness) is not itself an experience that exhibits basic intentionality. The subject is not presented to itself “as an object”.¹⁰

In a recent paper, Guillot (2017) proposes that *the subjective character* refers to several distinct notions that are being confused by certain authors:

9 When I say *self-awareness*, I mean *awareness of the self* and not *awareness of awareness* as in „higher-order” and “self-representational” theories of consciousness. For a good discussion on this distinction and on the relation between phenomenality and self-consciousness, see Siewert (2013). Pre-reflective self-awareness could be present universally, in every conscious creature that is a subject of experience, and in every episode of experiencing.

10 Apart from Nida-Rümelin (2014, 2017), such a “non-objectual” view of pre-reflective self-awareness in modern philosophy of mind is also to be found in Zahavi (2014). However, it is arguable what exactly Zahavi means by “non-objectifying form of self-consciousness”. He is alternating between *subject-self-consciousness* and *state-self-consciousness*. Siewert contends that “presence” or “givenness” of experience, how experience is phenomenally “for me” or “mine”, should be understood as a kind of self-awareness: “think about the way the viewpoint of the looker is implicit in how things look” (Siewert 2013, 31). A form of self-awareness is built into the experience: “marginal” *awareness of oneself as a looker*.

for-me-ness (a relation of awareness between a subject and an experience of hers), *me-ness* (a reflexive relation of awareness a subject has to herself) and *mineness* (a relation of awareness between a subject and a fact that it owns the experience, the fact of ownership) and all these are about relations of awareness between *a subject* and *its experiences* (Guillot 2017, 32).¹¹ These are distinct properties not to be conflated. Guillot uses case studies of *depersonalization syndrome* and *thought-insertion* to support her tripartite framework. There is no *prima facie* entailment between these notions. Mineness and me-ness are not universally present, though for-me-ness seems to be.¹² Guillot argues that the property of mineness can be lacking in certain cases, like schizophrenic “thought-insertion” cases. Schizophrenic patients may lack mineness, awareness of ownership, but they could still have self-awareness (*me-ness*).¹³

4. Self-acquaintance

If we have self-awareness and this awareness affords self-acquaintance, we are on our way to having a better understanding of the metaphysical nature of the self. First, it needs to be proved that *acquaintance* with one’s *self* is possible. Modern acquaintance theory comes from Russell and denotes the closeness and intimacy of the subject to her experiences (experiential properties of consciousness). The consequence of this closeness is that the nature of experiences is *revealed* to the subject. The most likely candidates for the things we are directly aware of or acquainted with are *experiences*, that is, experiential properties of consciousness. Other candidates are the *subjects* of those experiences.¹⁴ Modern proponents of the acquaintance approach to introspective or phenomenal knowledge are Gertler (2012), Goff (2015, 2017), Horgan and Kriegel (2007), and Nida-Rümelin (2007, 2016).

11 Howell and Thompson think that these notions are about *Phenomenal Me-ness*, for which there are two conditions: *The Phenomenal Condition* – Phenomenal me-ness must make some contribution to a subject’s total phenomenal character. *The Representational Condition* – Phenomenal me-ness must in some way present or refer to the self (Howell and Thompson 2016, 4).

12 What Zahavi has in mind when he talks about *mineness* is actually the first notion, namely, *for-me-ness*. In Guillot’s interpretation, *me-ness* is what Nida-Rümelin calls *pre-reflective self-awareness*.

13 There are several possible views on the prevalence of these features in consciousness. Farrell and McClelland (2017, 4–5) see three options: Universalism (inner awareness, as they call it, is present in all non-reflective experiences), Typicalism (not present in atypical cases) and Absentism (never present). Three forms of inner awareness that they make distinct, following Guillot, are also: for-me-ness, me-ishness and mineness. In their terms, Nida-Rümelin ‘is a universalist about for-me-ness. She also seems to be at least a typicalist, and perhaps a universalist about something similar to me-ishness and something similar to mineness’ (2017, 12).

14 Which are generally left out of the acquaintance discussion.

Brie Gertler's (2012) approach is explicitly defended as more "modest" than Russell's theory, though it is a descendant of this theory. Gertler's *acquaintance approach to introspective knowledge* is expressed by the claim that we can sometimes *directly* grasp our experiences, and in such situations, we form phenomenal concepts and introspective judgments about our experiences. These make up our *knowledge by acquaintance*. As Gertler formulates it, the main thesis is that in grasping experiences, phenomenal reality "intersects" with the epistemic (Gertler 2012, pp. 94–95). Three conditions need to be met for something to be a judgement of introspective knowledge. Such introspective judgements are directly tied to their truthmakers. For their justification, they only depend on the subject's conscious states. They are more justified than empirical judgements (Gertler 2012, 100). The Acquaintance claims that the gap between *epistemic appearances* and *phenomenal reality* is sometimes filled. There is also a *metaphysical* claim here since phenomenal reflects the metaphysical reality: judgements are directly tied to their truthmakers – experiences, and these are experiential events.¹⁵

Acquaintance is the thesis that our intimacy with experience puts us in the position to know the real nature of the experience – the nature of the thing acquainted with is revealed to us. Goff calls it the *Real Acquaintance* and defines it as: 'A psychologically normal subject can come to know the real nature of one of her phenomenal qualities by attending to that quality' (Goff 2015, 124). A closely related thesis he proposes is: '*Phenomenal Certainty*: A psychologically normal subject is able to put herself into a situation in which, with respect to one of her phenomenal qualities, she is justified in being certain that that quality is instantiated (where to be certain that P is roughly to believe with a credence of 1 that P)' (2015, 124). That is to say, phenomenal knowledge is completely infallible. When one has an experience, there can be no doubt that one has it, that the given experiential property is instantiated (translated to the *framework of experiential properties* terminology). Goff's thesis of *Phenomenal Certainty*, which is not only implied by *Real Acquaintance*, is encountered once again as explained by *Real Acquaintance*, because it is a very plausible thesis in its own right. In Goff's theory, it is coupled with *Phenomenal Insight*.¹⁶

15 Note that in Russellian acquaintance the relation of acquaintance is between a subject and a thing (sense-datum). In modern accounts it is a relation between an introspective judgment and its truthmaker.

16 "*Phenomenal Insight*: We have rich a priori knowledge concerning our phenomenal qualities." (Goff 2015, 128). Goff defends "*Phenomenal Transparency*: Phenomenal Transparency is the thesis that phenomenal concepts reveal the essence of the states they denote. According to Revelation, when a person attends to a token conscious state under a direct phenomenal concept, the complete nature of the type to which it belongs is apparent to her; this entails Direct Phenomenal Transparency: the thesis that direct phenomenal concepts are transparent" (Goff 2017, 108).

If there is acquaintance, then the Revelation thesis is true. To know the nature or essence of a property (phenomenal property P) is to know what it is for the property to be instantiated. If I have a sensation of purpleness, then I know that an experiential property of being phenomenally presented with purple is instantiated in me.

Why is acquaintance important? Because when one is acquainted with something, the *nature of the thing is revealed*. Why wouldn't the same hold for self-awareness, not just awareness of the experience? Self-awareness is the awareness that the self has of itself that *is direct and immediate*, unmediated (Horgan and Nichols, 2016). So, it would be natural to expect that we are thus acquainted with ourselves, that we have self-acquaintance. And if this is "real self-acquaintance" then the nature of the self is revealed to us in acquaintance. If the self can satisfy these requirements, then it can be claimed that we have self-acquaintance in addition to acquaintance with experience (properties).

It seems plausible that for one to argue that the self is a substance and that the self knows this from its experience, one would need a premise that would state the possibility of a subject being *acquainted* with oneself. To know its own nature, a subject must have the proper ability to know this nature to have access to that nature. However, one need not expound on ambitious notions of acquaintance in order to do so. I can be wrong about the precise content of some experiences, but I cannot be wrong that I am having some experiences right now, whatever they might be.

One is especially acquainted with oneself because (pre-reflective) self-awareness or self-presence is so intimate it is immediate and direct (unmediated). Is *self-acquaintance* as plausible as acquaintance with experiences, or do we need additional arguments for it? Many believe that when we have direct awareness of something, then we are acquainted with it. If we have direct awareness of the self, if there is self-awareness, then the self or subject is acquainted with itself. Duncan (2015) has argued that the self passes, what he calls, *The Doubt Test*, which is a test for acquaintance with something. *The Doubt test* can be found in theories from Descartes' to Russell's, but also in modern theories, like Gertler's (2012) approach and Horgan and Kriegel's (2007). This test states that if we cannot doubt the existence of something being presented to us in awareness, then we are acquainted with it. We can doubt that the object that is producing my experiences of it exists, but I cannot imagine any sceptical scenario which would make me doubt that I have any experiences in the first place.

Duncan points out that in the case of an acquaintance with our experiences, we are in the position to be aware of their essence, but it also seems to some philosophers that this is not the case in self-awareness. There could exist an *asymmetry* between experiences and the self. Acquaintance with the self is only partial, revealing only some aspects. But there is no real

asymmetry here. The self is as much (directly) revealed as the experience. Both experiences and the self could have hidden aspects unrevealed. What is presented, though, is being directly aware of.

Though *prima facie* it may look as if there is a difference between acquaintance with experiences and acquaintance with the self in the sense there is an *appearance/reality gap*, Duncan argues that this is not the case. Experience is as it seems, and the self's properties could be misleading in the way experience would not be. But the self and the experience are on par with this; the same could be said for experience. There is no appearance/reality gap with some aspects of the self, like me being the subject of a certain experience. There is no such gap between seeming and being the subject of my experiences and the same for 'occupying a certain perspective'¹⁷ of a subject (Duncan 2015, 2546). In both cases, we cannot doubt that there is something phenomenally in awareness (of experience and the self). Therefore, I cannot doubt that I have some experiences and that it is me that is the subject of these experiences. If this is the case, according to a plausible Doubt test, then we can be acquainted with both our experiences and ourselves.¹⁸

5. What is it like to be a bundle?

To vindicate my claim that we can infer from the phenomenology of pre-reflective self-awareness that subjects are substances, I would like to demonstrate that there is no phenomenological proof for the bundles of experiences view of the self. Phenomenological differences in awareness of a bundlist and a substantialist should be highlighted.

17 Talk of "perspectives" can also be misleading. See Nida-Rümelin (2017, Section 10) for discussion.

18 Russell contemplated the possibility of self-acquaintance but was cautious since he considered it a difficult question, but he admitted that it is *probable* for the acquaintance of selves to occur, "though not certain" (Russell 1912, 50–51). Russell says that there is acquaintance with two things in relation (self and its sense-datum), if one is acquainted with his acquaintance with a sense-datum: "Self-acquainted-with-sense-datum". He contends that even to know the truth of being acquainted with a sense-datum, we need to be acquainted with the "I", the self. There is a striking likeness between what Russell says about self-acquaintance and Guillot's formulation of mineness, awareness of the fact of ownership (that a subject has an experience). There are those that argue that we are not directly aware of ourselves but indirectly through being aware of our experiential states (Chisholm, 1969). Chisholm would argue that to be "acquainted with the self as it is" just is to be "acquainted with the self as it manifests itself as having qualities" (1969, 21). In support of the opposite claim, take into account what Horgan and Nichols write about *the zero point*: "The self that is present in consciousness directly and without the mediation of a self-representation— the me that is experientially present via the for-me-ness of consciousness—is directly present in experience" (Horgan and Nichols 2016, 148). They use slightly different terminology, that is, instead of pre-reflective self-awareness, they use "non-representational self-presence" or just "phenomenal subjectivity".

A bundlist would deny that there is self-awareness or mineness in any of the forms defended earlier. What one needs to do is to anticipate the would-be bundlist response to substantialist arguments: they could say that the *core bundle* plays the role of the subject (essential properties of the bundle) and that this fact is indiscernible from substantialist phenomenology, that is, it feels the same phenomenologically as being a substance. It would appear that the bundlist has a more economic theory of the self because it posits only one category.

One such bundle theory of the self is Barry Dainton's *phenomenal self* theory.¹⁹ By postulating something like a phenomenal *background*, a bundlist could explain self-awareness, it is claimed. Still, I would argue that, on the ground of acquaintance in awareness, the difference in metaphysics produces a difference in phenomenology.

Dainton understands mineness as a *meish* quality to experience (Dainton 2008, Ch. 8) and asks if it exists in phenomenology. As it was argued in earlier sections, such understanding of mineness and self-awareness is ill-conceived and misleading. The phenomenal background has an inner component, and this consists of "bodily experience, thoughts, memories, imaginings, and emotions", that is, of *experiences*. The inner phenomenal background creates (constitutes) the feeling of being me or you, the ambient "sense of self". The natural intimacy of "mineness" is gained when a new experience is incorporated in this background. Slors and Jongepier (2014) argue that the mineness of experience is a product of the *external* structure of experience in their *reductionist coherentist* account. It would appear that what they are considering as mineness is very different from what Zahavi has in mind or what we find in Guillot (2017). Although Slors and Jongepier agree with Zahavi that thoughts have first-personal givenness, the mineness they are defending has nothing to do with how it is usually conceived. It is the sense of familiarity of coherence of a certain experience with other background experiences. It is similar to Guillot's third property of mineness. Also, there is no real phenomenal datum to it, and Slor and Jongepier are very explicit about this, saying that there is "an absence of a further experiential feature" (Slors and Jongepier 2014, 194).

That the experience is mine is explained by the *co-consciousness* of this experience with the inner component of the phenomenal background. This background is the phenomenal *I* present in consciousness (Dainton 2008, 243). He points out that Parfit has also advocated "the reductionist view of

19 Donnchadh O'Conaill writes how Dainton "has developed a sophisticated version of the bundle theory", distinct from the classic bundle theory of Hume, one in which the subject is a bundle of *capacities for experiences*, and not a bundle of experiences themselves (O'Conaill 2019, 1–2). O'Conaill argues in his paper that Dainton's co-consciousness, as a relation of experiential togetherness, presupposes a common subject of the experiences and that the identity-conditions of experiential capacities cannot be specified without their subjects.

our *sense of self*.²⁰ Dainton thinks that there is no special awareness of the self as a thing, awareness of the subject as a subject, as that which is experiencing something, *the experiencer*. Apart from this being metaphysically problematic, it seems to me that it is phenomenologically unjustified. Usually, Dainton's C-system and the *phenomenal self* theory are attacked from metaphysics. I think that Dainton's theory should be criticized from a different (and arguably more plausible) understanding of mineness as self-awareness, as a real *sense of self*, that is as pre-reflective self-awareness of the subject as a subject of experiences.

6. Minimal self

What is it that we cannot doubt and that we are acquainted with when it comes to ourselves as subjects of experience? We cannot doubt, at least, that we have some experiences (experiential properties instantiated) and that it is us (me, you) who have those experiences, although we can be wrong about what exactly they are, what some of their aspects are. One could deny that in self-acquaintance we are presented with an individual essence, that in self-awareness it is disclosed to one that one is a specific, individual subject that bears the mark of uniqueness.

With his "minimal (experiential) self" theory, Zahavi tries to defend a third, middle-way position, between substance and bundle views of the self (Zahavi 2014, 18):

The phenomenological proposal can be seen as occupying a middle position between two opposing views. According to the first view, the self is some kind of unchanging soul-substance that is distinct from an ontologically independent of the worldly objects and conscious episodes it is directed at and of which it is the subject. According to the second view, there is nothing to the consciousness apart from a manifold or bundle of changing experiences. There are experiences and perceptions, but no experiencer or perceiver. A third option is available, however, the moment one realizes that an understanding of what it means to be a self calls for an examination of the structure of experience, and vice versa.²¹

20 Billon uses depersonalization cases to challenge Dainton's inner background theory of mineness, because depersonalisation can affect *all* conscious states, even those in the background. This suggests to Billon that mineness is explanatory prior to co-consciousness. Billon contends that in normal cases, we have unimpaired basic self-awareness, but this self-awareness cannot inform us on the nature of the self (Billon 2017, 6).

21 The experiential self of Zahavi has temporal extension and is something that can be shared by many (changing) experiences, although there may be interruptions of the stream of consciousness (unconscious episodes of sleep and coma). This sets Zahavi's theory apart from the bundle view, though he does not posit an extra self (as a substance)

The self is seen as a feature or function of the givenness of experience, as a dimension of experience that defies both elimination (in a bundle) and inflation to a substance. One could also call this the “*thin subject*” view.

Following what has been said in the discussion of Guillot (2017), it has become clear that in order to have a phenomenological and a metaphysical claim about the subject of experience, one needs something more than just *for-me-ness* of experience. Self-awareness is thus needed for this (me-ness). So, to have any introspective knowledge about the subject, we first need to have self-awareness. There is, perhaps, no mineness as a feature of the experience, but there is “mineness” as awareness between a subject and the fact of ownership. If there was just something like *for-me-ness* in experience (which is what Zahavi usually assumes to be *mineness*), this would be insufficient to support the subject as substance claims.

Guillot criticizes Zahavi’s position by showing that he moves from an epistemic to a phenomenal and a metaphysical thesis, “from the ‘self-manifestation’ of experience (*for-me-ness*) to a phenomenal access to the self (me-ness)” (Guillot 2017, 50). Zahavi makes an illegitimate move based on an unjustified assumption of equivalence, because he conflates *for-me-ness* with *me-ness*, and ends up claiming that a property (*for-me-ness* as a quality of experience) is the “minimal self”.

In the next section, I will discuss what we can learn about the nature of the subject of experience from pre-reflective self-awareness (me-ness).

7. Individual nature of the self

When one has peered into the essence of the subject (the self) and has been acquainted with oneself, one is aware that he is a thing that has experiences. One philosopher who argues for this kind of revelation of the subject in self-awareness is Nida-Rümelin (2017 75):

But even before such conceptualization we are aware of ourselves as ‘uniting’ simultaneous and subsequent experiences. And if to unite simultaneous and subsequent experiences partially characterizes our own nature as experiencing beings, then this means that we are, in pre-reflective self-awareness, aware of ourselves as belonging to that particular ontological category; we are thus aware – in pre-reflective self-awareness – of ourselves as subjects in the following substantial sense: our nature is present to us in such self-awareness in a phenomenologically manifest way.

to account for the diachronic unity and personal identity, either. Still, some kind of *awareness of diachronicity* in pre-reflective self-awareness is preserved (Zahavi 2014, 77). This is explicitly stated by Zahavi: “Whether the same experiential self is present in two temporally distinct experiences depends on whether the two experiences in question partake in the same dimension of mineness or *for-me-ness*” (2014, 72).

What this means is that in pre-reflective self-awareness we are aware of ourselves as entities (things) that unite experiences and are their bearers; the owners of such and such experiences. If this is our nature as subjects (or, at least, a partial aspect of our nature), then we are aware of this aspect or characterization of our nature, we are aware of ourselves as unifiers of experiences. This is the “general concept” we have of an experiencing subject and it is based on pre-reflective self-awareness.

Self-awareness based conceptualization of the fact that “simultaneous instantiations of experiential properties are instantiated by one and the same subject” (Nida-Rümelin 2017, 76) is *nature-revealing*. What this conceptualization reveals is *the simple view*.²² This could also be put thus: to be aware of oneself as the one who stays the same in changing experiences that one has. It is the same subject who has all the simultaneous and past experiences and is engaged in actions.

According to Nida-Rümelin, in the self-awareness based understanding of synchronic unity, self-awareness pre-reflectively gives us the nature of ourselves as subjects, that we are unifiers of experiences. If we could conceive of a reverse case: that there is a causal connection between experiences (or a *co-consciousness* relation that Dainton posits) that makes them simultaneously mine, but I do not grasp it. That is, the situation is due to the causal facts, but I do not conceptualize them, then the concept of synchronic unity is *opaque* in Goff’s (2011) terms and this does not seem to be right. If this was the case, then my self-awareness based understanding of my synchronic unity does not reveal to me what it is for me to have simultaneous experiences and Nida-Rümelin rightly warns that this is an unacceptable scenario. Self-awareness based understanding of synchronic unity is nature revealing and there is self-acquaintance (and self-revelation).

Exactly in pre-reflective self-awareness, if this analysis is right, we are aware of ourselves as the one who unites the experiences, this is part of our

22 The simple view states that simultaneous experiential properties are instantiated in one subject. Nida-Rümelin (2017, Section 14) goes on to argue that pre-reflective self-awareness also gives us an understanding of our own diachronic unity, of what it means to have experiences at different moments belonging to the same subject. With it we get the *simple view about diachronic unity* and the *simple view about transtemporal identity* of subjects (Nida-Rümelin, 2012). The simple view or *non-reductive view* with respect to personal identity and diachronic unity was also advocated by E. J. Lowe (1996). Lowe writes: “Moreover, the self’s substantial simplicity is in no way incompatible with its manifest psychological complexity, though that simplicity does help to explain its psychological *unity*. The simplicity of the self is seen to imply that its diachronic identity — its persistence through time — is irreducible and ungrounded, and hence criterionless” (1996, 10). Zahavi discussed the issue of diachronic unity in his *experiential self* account, and concluded that such self has temporal extension even before obtaining narrative capacities and that “our pre-reflective self-consciousness includes some awareness of diachronicity” (Zahavi 2014, 77).

nature revealed, we are “aware of being the one single individual who has those properties at once” (Nida-Rümelin 2017, Section 13), of being the individual who has many simultaneous experiences. All these experiences are united because they belong to that one individual.

A closely related issue is that of *the phenomenal concept* of the subject/self. How could we make sense of such phenomenal concepts? How can there be any concepts of the subject in pre-reflective self-awareness? Nida-Rümelin (2017) tries to account for this with the “general concept” of the experiencing subject. Although friends of the Acquaintance/Revelation thesis gladly defend phenomenal concepts of experiences (experiential properties or phenomenal qualities), the same is not easily said of phenomenal concepts of subjects. There is very little literature on the topic today and substantial work is to be done in order to defend the plausibility of such phenomenal concepts.²³

Let us now ask the important question: in order for this phenomenological argument to work, should a subject be aware of the fact of ownership or is pre-reflective self-awareness enough? If all traits of substantial nature are revealed in self-acquaintance, then it can be inferred, very straightforwardly, that the self is revealed to be a substance. Perhaps, the property of *mineness*, in Guillot’s terms, that is an awareness between a subject and a fact that it owns the experience (where ownership is revealed), would be the most persuasive phenomenological evidence. Still, it could turn out that this property is not essential for the subject and could be absent in pathological cases.

One could argue that, given the definition of a substance, three conditions need to be met – the subject/substance is the *bearer, unifier and individuator of experiences*. Regarding the third metaphysical requirement for something being a substance, I find it hard to understand what *individuation* would “look” like in our phenomenology, if it is phenomenally present at all. If only the first two traits are revealed – that the subject is the bearer and unifier of experiences and not their individuator – then we might need a further argument.²⁴

If the most plausible accounts of pre-reflective self-awareness and mineness are taken, as discussed in previous sections of the paper, arguably, some substance-like traits are revealed. Even if phenomenology does not justify the claim that the subject is aware of all the needed traits, enough data may be present in awareness to conclude that the subject is a substance.

23 Guillot argues for one “phenomenal model” of the concept of the self (I-concept), which is grounded in *cognitive phenomenology*, specifically in *the phenomenology of intellection* (e.g., Guillot, 2016).

24 If we have a *transparent* phenomenal concept (terminology of Goff, 2011) of the subject, it is such that the whole nature of its referent is revealed. However, if only a part of nature is revealed, we would have a *translucent* concept.

In pre-reflective self-awareness, an experiencing individual is aware of itself as an *individual*, that is, aware of its own *individual nature*²⁵, and this nature is very different from the one revealed in acquaintance with experience.

Recall what was said in Section 4. If one finds Goff's *Phenomenal Insight*, or a similar claim, plausible, and one is acquainted with one's self and with one's experiences, as it is claimed, then one knows that the subject is something essentially different from experience (self-awareness presents essentially different content from the content of awareness of experience) and one would not confuse these two. One could then use *Phenomenal Insight* to give support to the present argument. If there is acquaintance and if the essence of the self and the experiences is revealed, the subject should be able, on the basis of that acquaintance, to see the distinction between the self and the experience.

It would seem that something else would be known in self-acquaintance if the self is a bearer of properties, then what would be known if the self was a property or an aspect itself? This difference in facts can be found in different revelations of bundlists and substantialists. This is seen in the difference between pre-reflective self-awareness (awareness of oneself) and awareness of experiential content ("objects" that are phenomenally presented to the subject). Here, we should take into consideration what was said earlier about the specific nature of pre-reflective self-awareness, something that makes it unique (being non-objectual awareness). That there is a difference in the contents of these awarenesses was stressed in Section 3. I find that this gives us an additional argument in support of the claim that the self is a substance.

25 One could explain the specific content of pre-reflective self-awareness with a reference to a *haecceity* ("thisness" or "individual essence") at the heart of the conscious individual. Could there be something like a haecceity of the subject of experiences? One version of the view was held by Swinburne (1995). His position is that only *conscious* beings have haecceities and can *grasp* those haecceities. "The property of being me, if it exists, might indeed be called a 'perspectival' property—a property which something has in virtue of being thought of or grasped from a particular 'point of view' (its own)" (Lowe 2003, 88). Rosenkrantz (1993) defended the plausibility of haecceities in every object and argued that a person can grasp its own haecceity, that each individual is acquainted with himself, though haecceities of physical objects are ungraspable. Following the same intuition, Nida-Rümelin has defended that conscious individuals have a *non-descriptive* individual nature (Nida-Rümelin, 2012). One does not need to understand essences as properties. If there is a nature or essence of pain, it is not a further property that the property of pain has (Goff 2015, 126). Positing haecceities has intuitive appeal in the case of conscious individuals (subjects). Although a proponent of the *no-self* approach, Metzinger writes about a 'distinct phenomenology of singularity, a non-sensory phenomenology of 'thisness'— for example, in the phenomenology of meditation, but also in bodily self-consciousness. If we look closely enough, we can discover the phenomenology of primitive 'thisness' in our own subjective experience. It is particularly distinct in certain non-conceptual layers of self-awareness' (Metzinger 2011, 282). See Lowe (2003) for a related discussion on individuation.

8. Conclusion

I argued that the phenomenology of pre-reflective self-awareness gives weight to the metaphysical claim that subjects of experience are substances. To back this up, I argued from phenomenology that selves have experiences as instantiated experiential properties of which it is a bearer. It needs to be indicated that the *Acquaintance* needed in my argument is very minimal – what is only needed is that the subject is present in awareness and known *as the subject* of experiences, not that we have some knowledge of it as a substance. We are only aware that there *is* a subject. Therefore, I restrict my claim to saying that we are aware of our experiences and the subject of those experiences and that this gives support to the substance theory. The goal of this paper was to show that the phenomenological situation of pre-reflective self-awareness favours the substance view of selfhood, not to show what kind of a substance the self is, nor what precise theory of substances should be endorsed.

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