Master's Thesis:

The Contemplative Mind and Life

First-Person Methods and the Challenge of Pure
Consciousness and Phenomenal Selfhood for the
“Neurophenomenological” Research Program

By

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Abstract

A new paradigm in cognitive science has emerged called the “enactive approach”, which has given rise to a research program known as “neurophenomenology”. This research program attempts to calibrate third- and first-person methods to investigate consciousness. In his recent and representative work *Mind in Life*, Evan Thompson has put forward the thesis that there is a “deep continuity between life and mind”. While I remain sympathetic to the neurophenomenological approach as an *exemplar par excellence* of how the science of consciousness ought to proceed, I argue against this continuity thesis from three perspectives: (1) the nature and potential of first-person approaches to consciousness; (2) the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness; (3) the egological or non-egological nature of consciousness and selfhood. My argument begins by laying out the foundations of enactive cognitive science, the continental analysis of time-consciousness and Thompson’s attempt to close the empirical gap between life and mind with the help of the neurophenomenological bridging strategy (dynamic systems theory). Next, I discuss the phenomenology of different types of (structured) experiences and the fact that continental and contemplative methods share a common logic. I then argue that first-person methods (i) offer *prima facie* evidence that there are perceptual and non-perceptual types of experience, and (ii) grant us “cognitive access” to both types of experience. Following this, I consider at least one non-perceptual type of experience (pure consciousness) that breaks down the dynamic and relational structure of time-consciousness. I argue that pure consciousness is phenomenally lived-through but without egocentricity (subject-pole). Furthermore, a sophisticated distinction between (i) a minimal, core sense of (ego-) self and (ii) a non-egological but phenomenally lived-through subjectivity, is capable of shedding light on long-lasting debates surrounding

the existence and non-existence of self (*ātman*). This especially holds true with regards to Buddhist philosophy and objectors to the doctrine of not-self (*anatta/anātman*). Finally, the nature of pure consciousness will lead me to challenge Thompson's continuity thesis, on the grounds that phenomenological evidence shows that the *contemplative mind* (pure consciousness) is decidedly not dynamic and intentional in structure. Thus there is a conceptual discontinuity between the biological domain and the phenomenological domain, being a decisive conceptual disanalogy between the contemplative mind (consciousness proper) and life. I thus conclude that *prima facie*: (1) first-person methods give us cognitive access to the objective and subjective domain of consciousness; (2) continental phenomenology is mistaken about the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness; (3) consciousness qua *awareness per se* is non-egological. Having completed my argument against the continuity thesis, I will briefly recommend specific avenues for future neurophenomenological research to (a) adjudicate between continental and contemplative phenomenological views of consciousness; (b) judge whether or not Thompson's continuity thesis can be upheld; and (c) introduce new ways of studying (phenomenal) selfhood. In this way, I hope not only to argue against Thompson's continuity thesis, but to also point towards the potential of the neurophenomenological research program to advance our understanding of consciousness and phenomenal selfhood.

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Introduction

What's been hidden is meditation's role as a precision tool for exploring consciousness and the universe scientifically – that is, using empirical methods similar to the scientific method.¹

B. Alan Wallace

Over the last two decades first-person methods have become more popular in the scientific study of consciousness. A new paradigm in cognitive science has also emerged called the “enactive approach”, which attempts to calibrate third- and first-person methods to investigate consciousness. This research program is known as “neurophenomenology”. Evan Thompson has been identified as the standard bearer of this neurophenomenological enterprise.² In his recent work *Mind in Life*, Thompson has put forward the thesis that there is a “deep continuity between life and mind”.³

In this thesis, I will argue against this continuity thesis from three perspectives:

- (1) the nature and potential of first-person approaches to consciousness;
- (2) the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness;
- (3) the egological or non-egological nature of consciousness and selfhood.

I will thus challenge the theoretic thrust of the neurophenomenological strategy to bridge biology and phenomenology (with the help of dynamic systems theory). However, I want to be clear that I remain sympathetic to the neurophenomenological approach as an *exemplar par excellence* of how the science of consciousness ought to proceed. Therefore, I

¹ B. Alan Wallace, *Mind in the Balance: Meditation in Science, Buddhism, & Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 1.

² John Dunne, “The Impact of How It Feels: Neurophenomenology and the Cognitive Science of Religion,” *New Scientific Approaches to the Study of Religious Experience* (An experimental transatlantic videoconference held Friday, May 22, 2009 between EMORY UNIVERSITY: Center for Mind, Brain, and Culture and the Department of Religion and UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD: Centre for Anthropology and Mind; Sponsored by the American Academy of Religion), <http://vimeo.com/6392836> (accessed July 31, 2010).

³ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 15.

intend not only to argue against Thompson's thesis, but to point out what neurophenomenology may be able to accomplish with future research at each of the above three levels.

Thompson's basic argument for continuity is the following:

- Premise 1:** Life: biologically "living" systems are autonomous (dynamically self-organising) and relational.
- Premise 2:** Mind: phenomenologically "lived" systems are self-aware over time (in this way also dynamically self-organising) and open towards alterity.
- Supported by:** The thesis of continental phenomenology that the dynamic structure of time-consciousness is the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness.
- Premise 3:** We can describe both the biological domain and the phenomenological domain with a common dynamic model.
- Conclusion:** At a fundamental level there is continuity between life and mind.

My counter argument ("ca") goes as follows:

- Premise 1^{ca}:** Phenomenologically, there are different types of (structured) experiences.
- Premise 2^{ca}:** First-person methods offer *prima facie* evidence that there are perceptual *and* non-perceptual types of experience.
- Premise 3^{ca}:** First-person methods grant us cognitive access to both perceptual and non-perceptual types of experience.
- Premise 4^{ca}:** At least one non-perceptual type of experience (pure consciousness) breaks down the structure of time-consciousness.
- Supported by:** The neuophenomenological commitment to take first-person evidence seriously.
- Premise 5^{ca}:** Non-perceptual experiences are neither dynamic nor relational.
- Sub-concl. 1:** *Prima facie*, continental phenomenology is wrong about the fundamental

structure of consciousness.

Sub-concl. 2: Dynamic systems theory cannot offer a common model of description for the biological domain and the phenomenological domain.

Conclusion^{ca}: At a fundamental level, there remains a deep conceptual discontinuity between the contemplative mind (consciousness proper) and life.

In Chapter 1, I will lay out the philosophy of biology and life put forward by Thompson as the methodological theme of this paper. I will first explicate the enactive approach to cognitive science, and then outline Varela's and Thompson's account of life (premise 1 and 2). Next, I will introduce the continental view that the self-aware nature of mind is the dynamic structure of time-consciousness. Finally, I will explain how Thompson attempts to close the empirical gap between life and mind with the help of the theoretical component of the neurophenomenological paradigm (premise 3).

In Chapter 2, I will initiate my case against Thompson's continuity thesis by exploring a plateau of consensus between myself and some continental phenomenologists: that there are multiple types of experience that differ in structure (premise 1^{ca}). In order to further explain "perceptual" types of experience, upon which I agree with continental phenomenologists, I will also discuss the objective (intentional) principle of consciousness and the distinction between narrow and broad intentionality.

Once I exhaust this common ground, I will discuss my disagreement with continental phenomenology on the particular issue of whether or not our subjectivity can be self-enclosed, adding to the list of possible experiences a non-perceptual type, which continental phenomenologists deny. The following chapters will provide good reasons for accepting the possibility of such a non-perceptual type of experience (premise 2^{ca}).

Chapter 3 will introduce the basic logic of first-person methods for the investigation of consciousness. First, I will argue that the phenomenological method and the contemplative

method have a common logic. I will also show that neurophenomenology is turning to the practical expertise of the contemplative method to aid the phenomenological method. I will then suggest that professionally trained subjects in the contemplative method have more precise and reliable cognitive faculties, which, in turn, make them the most suitable candidates to examine non-perceptual types of experience.

In Chapter 4, I will consider nine objections to such first-person methods. The first seven of these objections raise possible reasons we may not have cognitive access to the intentional domain of consciousness. Objections eight and nine raise possible reasons we may not have cognitive access to the self-aware domain of consciousness. I then devote the remainder of Chapter 4 to responding to the first seven objections. I will draw on the ground I share with continental phenomenology to argue that we can have cognitive access to the intentional domain of consciousness. In particular, in responding to objections four to six, I will consider and reject representational theories of mind (and thereby open the way for an alternate, non-representational theory, which I will introduce in the following chapter).

Chapter 5 responds to objection eight by developing an account of cognitive access that can expand the list of “observable experiences” to non-perceptual types. I will begin with additional reasons to reject representational theories of mind. This will clarify the relationship between the traditional mode of cognitive access to intentional experience (reflection) and the mode of access appropriate to the rather inaccessible domain of self-awareness. Next, I will re-visit both reflection and self-awareness, in order to re-define what we mean to capture by the notion of “cognitive access”. Finally, I will attempt to account for cognitive access by introducing a “Theory of Disclosing” (my alternative to the representational theories rejected in Chapter 4), by which I will argue, against continental phenomenologists, that we in fact do have cognitive access to the self-aware principle of consciousness (premise 3^{ca}).

My final chapter, Chapter 6, discusses a non-perceptual type of experience that is

encountered by contemplative phenomenologists who rely on the contemplative method to investigate consciousness (premise 2^{ca}). I refer to this type of experience as the “pure consciousness event”. The pure consciousness event lacks a subject-object structure (in a very radical sense) that affects both the object-pole and the ego-pole. I thus review egological and non-egological theories of consciousness to clarify whether or not it is meaningful to speak of a subjectless or egoless consciousness. I will argue that pure consciousness is phenomenally lived-through but without egocentricity (subject-pole). Furthermore, a sophisticated distinction between (i) a minimal, core sense of (ego-) self and (ii) a non-egological but phenomenally lived-through subjectivity, is capable of shedding light on long-lasting debates surrounding the existence and non-existence of self (*ātman*). This especially holds true with regards to Buddhist philosophy and objectors to the doctrine of not-self (*anatta/anātman*). Consequently, pure consciousness might also qualify as the invariant structure of consciousness, which the Mahāyāna (in *tathagatagarbha* doctrine) justifiably identifies as the (great) “Self”.

Finally, I will move this debate of selfhood and self-awareness to the level of time-consciousness, which Thompson has relied on to establish continuity between life and mind. I will show that continental phenomenologists strongly connect selfhood and time-consciousness, but that pure consciousness undermines this understanding, because it breaks down the dynamic structure of time-consciousness (premise 4^{ca}). This characteristic of pure consciousness will lead me to challenge Thompson’s continuity thesis, on the grounds that phenomenological evidence shows that the *contemplative mind* (pure consciousness) is decidedly not dynamic and intentional in structure (premise 5^{ca}). Thus there is a conceptual discontinuity between the biological domain and the phenomenological domain. I take this to be a decisive conceptual disanalogy between the contemplative mind (consciousness proper) and life.

Having thus established (i) that first-person methods do give us cognitive access to the subjective domain of consciousness; (ii) that continental phenomenology is mistaken about the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness; and (iii) that consciousness qua *awareness per se* is non-egological, I will recommend specific avenues of future neurophenomenological research to (a) adjudicate between continental and contemplative phenomenological views of consciousness; (b) judge whether or not Thompson's continuity thesis can be upheld; and (c) introduce new ways of studying (phenomenal) selfhood. In this way, I hope not only to argue against Thompson's continuity thesis, but to also point towards the potential of the neurophenomenological research program to advance our understanding of consciousness and phenomenal selfhood.

Chapter 1

The “Continuity” between Life and Mind: Neurophenomenology and the Philosophy of Life

A philosophy of life comprises the philosophy of the organism and the philosophy of mind.⁴

Hans Jonas

I will begin by laying out the philosophy of biology and life put forward by Evan Thompson in his work *Mind in Life*, to explain how Thompson’s neurophenomenological approach attempts to account for a “deep continuity between life and mind”⁵ in very interesting ways. This will serve as the methodological theme I intend to examine in greater detail as the project unfolds in order to show (i) that contemplative phenomenology challenges traditional views on consciousness held by continental phenomenologists; (ii) that contemplative accounts of consciousness break away from Thompson’s definition of “life”; and (iii) that such contemplative accounts of consciousness are a very promising subject for empirical research within the enactive paradigm of cognitive science (neurophenomenology).

In this chapter I will first explain the enactive approach to cognitive science. Next, I will outline Varela’s and Thompson’s account of life and living biological organisms. Third, I will introduce phenomenology with a focus on self-awareness and its relationship to time-consciousness. Fourth, I will explain how Thompson attempts to close the empirical gap between the two, that is, “life” (the biologically living body, i.e. “*Körper*”) and “mind” (the phenomenologically lived body, i.e. “*Leib*”), with the help of the neurophenomenological

⁴ Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 1.

⁵ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 15.

paradigm. It will be the task of the following chapters to build on this foundation and explicate claims (i)-(iii) from above.

1.1 *Enactive Cognitive Science*

In order to understand Thompson's ideas, we need to first understand the paradigm in which he operates. This paradigm is the "enactive" approach to cognitive science, which is also the background from which the research program called "neurophenomenology" has emerged.

In a general sense *enaction* means to perform or carry out an action. The enactive approach offers an account of the mind that is dynamic and embodied. It also tries to bridge an enactive (embodied) view of the mind and phenomenological accounts of subjective experience.⁶

The view that cognition is embodied action (enaction) was first introduced into cognitive science by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch in their collaborative work *The Embodied Mind*.⁷ Over a decade later, Thompson reminds us in his book *Mind in Life* (which is a continuation of this project) that the aim of the first instalment was to unify a range of interconnected ideas into one paradigm coined "the enactive approach".⁸ Thompson lists five ideas that define this approach.⁹

First, living beings are autonomous. Their autonomous agency allows them to give rise to themselves and also maintain themselves. This also generates their cognitive domains, which are enacted by them.

Second, the nervous system is a dynamic and autonomous system. It too gives rise to and maintains its own patterns of activity, which in turn generates meaning.

⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 13.

⁷ Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 172-180, 205.

⁸ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 13.

⁹ Ibid.

Third, cognition is skillful interaction with the world; it is a sensorimotor coupling between organism and environment. Thus cognition is situated in a world and embodied in skillful activity.

Fourth, the world of a cognitive agent is not a predetermined domain that is fixed and external to the agent. An independent world is not represented inside the head. Rather, the world is a domain best described as a relational continuum that is determined by the way the agent autonomously enacts the kind of coupling it has with its environment.¹⁰

Fifth, experience is not epiphenomenal. In contrast, it is vital for understanding the mind, and it has to be examined carefully and phenomenologically.

Thompson proposes that the enactive approach has common ground with phenomenology when it comes to the matter of life: the enactive approach holds that a fundamental characteristic of biological life (the “living organism”, or “*Körper*”) is autonomy; phenomenology holds that a fundamental characteristic of phenomenal life (the “lived body”, or “*Leib*”) is “intentionality”¹¹. Both the enactive approach and phenomenology agree that consciousness has to be explicated in terms of both the autonomy and intentionality of life. This notion of “life” encompasses both the biological and phenomenological components of existence – it includes biological life, phenomenal life, and the “life-world” in which life is situated and embodied (either biologically or phenomenologically).¹²

In what follows, I will discuss the autonomy of biological life and show how it is inextricably linked to the intentional component of our phenomenological life. I will also bring to light how the enactive approach attempts to close the empirical gap between biological and phenomenological life, by accounting for the self-awareness of consciousness in terms of dynamic systems theory.

¹⁰ Evan Thompson and Francisco J. Varela, “Radical Embodiment: Neural Dynamics and Consciousness,” *TRENDS in Cognitive Science* 5:10 (Oct., 2001): 424-425.

¹¹ Intentionality refers to the outward directedness of consciousness. I discuss this notion further in Chapter 2.

¹² Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 15.

1.1.1 *The Enactive Approach: Autonomous and Dynamic Systems*

The enactive approach holds that self-organising processes, which involve the brain, body, and the environment, give rise to the mind.¹³ In order to understand what the enactive view means by this, we need to be clear about two central ideas enactive cognitive science entertains: emergence and autonomy.

The idea of emergence is related to processes of self-organisation and circular causality. According to Thompson, both of these have in common that they exhibit patterns of “bottom-up” and “top-down” reciprocal influence.¹⁴ This means that global patterns in a system arise from local interactions (local-to-global determination), but that these local interactions are also in turn governed and constrained by the global patterns that they give rise to (global-to-local determination).¹⁵ On the basis of this idea of circular and reciprocal causality, Thompson sketches a model of emergent processes that he calls “dynamic co-emergence”. Dynamic co-emergence describes how a whole does not arise solely from its parts, but that the parts also arise from the whole. In this way, the whole and its parts emerge together – they co-emerge – and mutually determine each other.¹⁶

What about dynamic systems? First, a system is a salient pattern of related processes that can be distinguished from a background of unrelated processes. This salient collection of processes forms a single whole from the viewpoint of the observer.¹⁷ We might also wish to say that this is a first step towards individuation and identity (I will return to this idea as the discussion unfolds).¹⁸

Second, a dynamic system is just such a salient, whole and individuated collection of processes that changes over time. Dynamic systems theory, then, attempts to establish

¹³ Ibid., 37.

¹⁴ Ibid., 38, 60-63. See also Evan Thompson and Francisco J. Varela, “Radical Embodiment: Neural Dynamics and Consciousness,” *TRENDS in Cognitive Science* 5:10 (Oct., 2001): 419-422.

¹⁵ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 63, 424.

¹⁶ Ibid., 38.

¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹⁸ Hans Jonas, “Biological Foundations of Individuality,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1968): 233.

(mathematical) models that specify how a given system changes or behaves over a period of time.¹⁹

What is an autonomous system? To answer this question, we need to first understand the difference between autonomy and heteronomy. Literally, autonomy means to be self-governed, and heteronomy means to be other-governed.

A heteronomous system is defined by an input-output organisational flow of information that is subject to external control (this is the classic paradigm of functional cognitive science). Thompson offers following example to illustrate a heteronomous system:²⁰ Imagine a network that has an input and an output layer. The inputs are given to the system from an external observer that is outside of the system's organisation. The outputs are then interpreted in the context of a task that was imposed onto the system from outside.

An autonomous system differs, because it is determined by dynamics that are internal to the system and self-organising; the dynamic involved is self-controlling. Rather than having an input-output informational flow, the way the system's structure is self-organised outlines its own cognitive domain (this is the classic paradigm of enactive cognitive science).²¹ For a system to be autonomous, then, it must consist of relational processes that have three characteristics:²² (i) they depend on each other to realise a network; (ii) they form a unity to make salient a system; and (iii) possible interactions with the environment occur in a domain that is specified by them.

Thompson and Varela offer an example as a paradigm case of autonomy: the living cell.²³ The processes involved are chemical. They are interdependent and generate a self-

¹⁹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 39, 42.

²⁰ Ibid., 43.

²¹ Ibid. See also Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 85-91.

²² Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 44.

²³ Ibid. See also Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 151-157.

producing network that is metabolic and builds its own membrane. This network is a unitary and salient system that determines a domain in which the system can interact with the environment. Such biochemical autonomy is known as *autopoiesis*.²⁴ Thompson offers the following figure to illustrate this autopoietic autonomy:

The basic autopoietic organisation

Although autopoiesis is the paradigm case of autonomy in the biological domain, autonomous systems need not be strictly autopoietic. An autopoietic system is one that generates its own membrane, but autonomous systems need not have material boundaries. To see this, Thompson asks of us to consider an insect colony, its members of which form an autonomous network. The boundary in this case is not material, but social.²⁵ Varela thus

²⁴ H. R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*. Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. 42 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980), xvii-xx. For a review of the historical origins of this concept see Evan Thompson and Francisco J. Varela, "Autopoiesis and Lifelines: The Importance of Origins," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 22 (1999): 909-910.

²⁵ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 44.

defines an autonomous system not as something that has material closure, but one that has *organisational closure*.²⁶

1.1.2 *Organisational Closure, Environmental Coupling, and Selfhood*

Varela put forward a “Closure Thesis” that says: “Every autonomous system is organizationally closed.”²⁷ According to Varela and Thompson, the closure thesis does not mean that a system is closed off from the external world in a material or energetic sense. Rather, the opposite is the case. Autonomous systems continuously exchange matter and energy with their environment. In this way, organisational closure defines the unity of a system through network relations that constitute it and are circularly interdependent. Their interdependence also allows for reentrant and recurrent processes. Hence Thompson states that “an autonomous system is always structurally coupled with its environment.”²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, who adopted an autonomy perspective, expressed this same idea in the following way:

Thus the form of the excitant is created by the organism itself, by its proper manner of offering itself to actions from outside. Doubtless, in order to be able to subsist, it must encounter a certain number of physical and chemical agents in its surroundings. But it is the organism itself – according to the proper nature of its receptors, the thresholds of its nerve centers and the movements of the organs – which chooses the stimuli in the physical world to which it will be sensitive.²⁹

The self-organising and self-producing processes of autonomous systems, then, give rise to organisational closure, which in turn makes the related and interdependent processes that govern it stand out over and against its surroundings. In so doing, the processes themselves define the domain of interaction through which the unified system is coupled with its environment.

In Thompson’s eyes, an organisationally closed system defines a form of selfhood that

²⁶ Francisco J. Varela, *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (New York: Elsevier North Holland, 1979), 55-60.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁸ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 45.

²⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour*, trans. by Alden L. Fisher (Methuen: London, 1965), 13.

co-emerges with a correlative otherness, world, or environment.³⁰ Thompson provides us with two hierarchical examples of this.

First, in the case of autopoietic closure, the autonomous biological system brings forth a “minimal ‘bodily self’ at the level of cellular metabolism”.

Second, in the case of sensorimotor closure, the autonomous physiological system brings forth a “‘sensorimotor self’ at the level of perception and action.”³¹

I want to connect these two forms of closure to our discussion on subjectivity (mind) and alterity (world). Hence I offer a further level of emerging selfhood:

Third, the case of indexical closure, an autonomous phenomenological system brings forth a minimal (sense of) “phenomenological self” at the level of first-personally lived-through subjectivity.

According to Thompson, the first case moves from “network closure to selfhood (and correlative otherness)” via the help of an active cell membrane that determines and regulates the interaction with the outside environment. In the second, case the move happens via the help of behaviour and intentional action. What Thompson wishes to emphasise here is that in both cases the inside and outside, as well as selfhood and correlative world (environment or otherness), co-emerge through the dynamics of autonomy and its physical embodiment.

Analogously, in the third case, I want to add that the move from closure to selfhood occurs via the help of the insuperable boundary of first-personal givenness. In fact, the indexical quality of the first-person perspective is precisely defined by it being accessible only to the one who has it. For the subject, other modes of givenness differ, because they are not accessible in the same way. They are only accessible through the perspective of those

³⁰ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 49.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

who live through them.³² When it comes to the phenomenological level, then, lived subjectivity and its correlative “life-world” co-emerge by virtue of the “operational” closure and experiential embodiment (manifestation) of the first-person perspective.

To capture the inter-relationship of the ideas just presented, I offer an adapted diagram to illustrate the first and second points from above:³³

To clarify the third phenomenological case I have added, in which selfhood and correlative world co-emerge, I have adjusted Thompson’s figure to capture this analogous scenario:

³² Dan Zahavi and John Dunne, “The Reflective Self: Questions and Answers, Part I (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” and colleagues Evan Thompson, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and John Dunne, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2369129033678559744&hl=en&emb=1#docid=6084386910063768436> (accessed July 31, 2010); and Dan Zahavi, “The Reflective Self: Questions and Answers, Part II (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” and colleagues Evan Thompson, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and John Dunne, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2369129033678559744&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010).

³³ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 49.

This third point introduces phenomenology. When we do this, we transition from mere autonomous systems to living systems. As Thompson points out, “the transition from physical structures to living structures is the transition from matter to life.”³⁴ In this way, Merleau-Ponty and Thompson view the transition to living structures as the emergence of a new order of nature that is qualitatively distinct from the physical order.³⁵ Such living structures have two distinct characteristics:³⁶ first, the organism emerges as an individual in a new sense, which cannot be limited to that of physical individuality;³⁷ second, the relation between individual (organism) and world (environment) is one characterised by meaning and normativity.

According to Merleau-Ponty, physical structures can be expressed in terms of laws, but living structures have to be accounted for in relation to norms: a world that means something to the individual.³⁸ This meaning (significance) emerges when a self-pole is coupled with an environment-pole.³⁹ If we apply Merleau-Ponty’s view of meaning to consciousness, then

³⁴ Ibid., 73.

³⁵ Ibid., 75.

³⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 49.

³⁷ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour*, trans. by Alden L. Fisher (Methuen: London, 1965), 137.

³⁸ Ibid., 154.

³⁹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 75.

consciousness is not an isolated brain which stands in a causal relationship with sensory input and behavioural output, but it enacts the domain of possible interactions where self and world are structurally coupled.

The individual is coupled to his environment by perceptual and motor attunement to the environment.⁴⁰ This sensorimotor view of consciousness is closely linked to the enactive approach, which holds that perceptual consciousness is a kind of skillful attunement.⁴¹ In the human case, the life-world of the person is constituted by meaningful symbols and the attuned and intentional actions of others, which are irreducibly normative.

In Merleau-Ponty's view, when we recognise that the generation of the self-pole is ontologically prior to the emergence of the internal/external dichotomy, and that the resultant coupling with the environment is normative,⁴² then, Thompson adds, "we can no longer regard life as a mechanism in the classical sense... Rather, we must then see nature as having a kind of inner life."⁴³ Moreno and Barandiaran concur. They say:

The (self) generation of an inside is ontologically prior to the dichotomy in-out. It is the inside that generates the asymmetry and it is in relation to this inside that an outside can be established. Although the interactive process/relations are necessary for the maintenance of the system, they presuppose it (the system) since it is the internal organization of the system that controls the interactive relations.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁴¹ Alva Noë and Evan Thompson, "Introduction," in *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, eds. Alva Noë and Evan Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 5; Evan Thompson, Adrian Palacios, and Francisco J. Varela, "Ways of Coloring: Comparative Color Vision as a Case Study for Cognitive Science," in *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, eds. Alva Noë and Evan Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 396-398; Alva Noë and J. Kevin O'Regan, "On the Brain-Basis of Visual Consciousness: A Sensorimotor Account," in *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, eds. Alva Noë and Evan Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 567; Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), vii, 1-3, 72-73, 113-122; Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (New York, Hill and Wang, 2009), vii-viii, 24, 47, 65; and Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 147-184.

⁴² A. Moreno and X. Barandiaran, "A naturalized Account of the Inside-Outside Dichotomy," *Philosophica* 73 (2004): 17.

⁴³ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 79-80.

⁴⁴ A. Moreno and X. Barandiaran, "A naturalized Account of the Inside-Outside Dichotomy," *Philosophica* 73 (2004): 17.

Thompson also believes that we must consider an irreducibly phenomenal component. This means that “naturalism cannot explain matter, life, and mind, as long as explanation means purging nature of subjectivity and then trying to reconstitute subjectivity of nature thus purged.”⁴⁵ This argument that Thompson puts forward is “transcendental”⁴⁶, but he does not mean to thereby justify idealism. Rather, the transcendental line of thought points out that whenever we ask how objects are experientially disclosed to us, we must consider the object as part of the “correlational structure of intentionality”⁴⁷. Thus if we ask how objects are disclosed, then we are forced to take into account the mental acts that intend the object. When we do this, we recognise that this transcendental line of thought does not deny “actually existing reality” (the external world), but that it rejects an objectivist account thereof. It reasons that the way the world is given to us cannot be detached from our subjectivity and its intentional activities that make disclosure of the world possible.⁴⁸

This gives consciousness a transcendental status. By this we mean that whenever we consider how it is possible for objects to be disclosed to us, we *always* presuppose consciousness as a prior and necessary condition for this.⁴⁹ Thompson argues that there is no way to remove ourselves from our own subjectivity, and that it is in this sense that the phenomenal world is *more alive* than the domain in which scientific objects are found. From an empirical standpoint, then, mind emerges from matter and life, but from a transcendental (phenomenal) standpoint anything discernible is only so because it is disclosed by

⁴⁵ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 81.

⁴⁶ The term “transcendental” is used in a phenomenological context here. It means that (i) subjectivity is irreducible, but (ii) that this affirmation also accepts (entails) the existence of the world because our subjectivity is directed (open) to and coupled with the world. Consciousness is thus “transcendental” because it *transcends* the world. However, it is important to note that at the same time, consciousness does not negate its existence. In this way, we can affirm the irreducibility of subjectivity without running into the problem of idealism, because the irreducible and *a priori* status of consciousness does not entail the view that only mind-stuff exists. Thus, we can endorse consciousness-a-priori and also hold onto the existence of our common sense world.

⁴⁷ The correlational structure comprises two components of our experience: the intentional act (noesis) and the intentional object (noema). The intentional act is the way in which experience manifests or is disclosed to us; the intentional object denotes the object in its givenness, as it is presented to us in our experience. This concept will receive further attention in Chapter 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 86.

consciousness-a-priori.⁵⁰

Varela proposed a methodological remedy to research consciousness understood in this transcendental and phenomenological sense. He labelled it “neurophenomenology”.⁵¹ It starts from the transcendental recognition that experience is ineliminable and aims to integrate the different orders (matter, mind, and life) without reducing any one domain to another.

Thompson continues this project and discusses the “continuity between life and mind”.⁵² I will discuss how neurophenomenologists envision this to be possible, with a close eye on Thompson work, which bears the standard of this research program today.⁵³

1.2 From Living Systems to Lived Systems: the Continuity between Life and Mind

In order for us to understand Varela’s and Thompson’s methodological remedy to transcendent consciousness, we must first understand how they connect living systems and lived systems. If we can see the connection, then we can understand the “natural roots” of our phenomenology.⁵⁴ In this way, Varela and Thompson attempt to account for the two fundamental principles of consciousness, namely intentionality and self-awareness. Let us then begin with living systems.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 87.

⁵¹ Francisco J. Varela, “Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for the Hard Problem,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The “Hard Problem”*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 337, 349-354.

⁵² Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 129.

⁵³ John Dunne, “The Impact of How It Feels: Neurophenomenology and the Cognitive Science of Religion,” *New Scientific Approaches to the Study of Religious Experience* (An experimental transatlantic videoconference held Friday, May 22, 2009 between EMORY UNIVERSITY: Center for Mind, Brain, and Culture and the Department of Religion and UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD: Centre for Anthropology and Mind; Sponsored by the American Academy of Religion), <http://vimeo.com/6392836> (accessed July 31, 2010).

⁵⁴ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 159.

1.2.1 *The Living System*

Maturana and Varela proposed that autopoiesis is both necessary and sufficient to characterise a living system,⁵⁵ but it must be said that they also believed that all autopoietic systems are cognitive systems. Recently this idea has been challenged. Interestingly though, objectors, in spite of their reservations, all agree with Maturana and Varela that a living system is both an autopoietic system and a cognitive system, but some disagree on the issue whether all autopoietic systems are cognitive systems.⁵⁶ I shall not concern myself with the details of this debate. What I will do is pick up my case from the plateau of consensus, namely that a living system is both autopoietic and cognitive.

Thompson believes that to understand a living system as both autopoietic and cognitive is to establish a deep continuity between life and mind.⁵⁷ In order to make sense of this, we need to further explicate the notion of cognition and how it relates to autopoiesis.

On the one hand, “autopoiesis” describes the self-producing network of a living system; on the other hand, “cognition” describes the way this network relates to (or enacts) its environment. In Maturana’s and Varela’s eyes, the relation between autopoiesis and cognition is twofold: (i) the emergence of an autopoietic system entails that it has a cognitive relation to its environment; and (ii) this cognitive relation subserves the system’s autopoietic continuation. Maturana describes this as follows:

A cognitive system is a system whose organization defines a domain of interactions in which it can act with relevance to the maintenance of itself, and the process of cognition is the actual (inductive) acting or behaving in this domain. *Living systems are cognitive systems,*

⁵⁵ H. R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*. Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. 42 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980), 82. See also Francisco J. Varela, *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (New York: Elsevier North Holland, 1979), 17.

⁵⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 124.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

and living as a process is a process of cognition. This statement is valid for all organisms, with and without a nervous system.⁵⁸

According to Thompson, the continuity of life and mind is not only organisational and cognitive, but also phenomenological. He believes that the theory of autopoiesis can bridge the philosophy of the organism and the philosophy of mind, because autopoiesis brings forth a normative relation to its environment, that is, it has *immanent purposiveness*.⁵⁹

The notion of immanent purposiveness has two aspects:⁶⁰ the first is *identity*; the second is *sense-making*. First, autopoiesis generates and sustains a dynamic identity of operational form in the presence of material change (e.g. the body renews itself numerous times throughout one life span; it undergoes material change, but maintains a dynamic bodily identity). Second, an autopoietic organism must make sense of its environment to maintain itself. According to Thompson, this sense-making (cognitive) component of living systems transforms the “physiochemical world into an environment of significance and valence”.⁶¹

Varela and Thompson believe that immanent purposiveness serves as a naturalised and biological explanation of purpose, because it is both cause and effect of itself (a non-linear and dynamic self-organisation).⁶² In this way, they put forward a theory of the minimal and biological foundations of intentionality: autopoiesis and sense-making. Thompson calls this the “natural roots of intentionality”,⁶³ and anywhere below this minimal level of complexity, which we have identified as autopoiesis (a living system), there is no phenomenological disclosure of the world.

⁵⁸ H. R. Maturana, “Biology of Cognition,” in H. R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*. Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. 42 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980), 13.

⁵⁹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 146.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 147.

⁶² Ibid., 140

⁶³ Ibid., 147, 159.

1.2.2 *The Lived System (Body)*

The minimal sense of intentionality put forward by Varela and Thompson denotes a kind of sense-making, i.e. a cognitive and normative relationship of a living system with its environment; however, not all such cognitive relations are conscious, by which we mean subjectively experienced.⁶⁴ As Thompson admits, “immanent purposiveness does not entail consciousness” and a minimally autopoietic selfhood does not necessarily establish phenomenal selfhood and subjectivity.⁶⁵ How then can we account for such consciousness?

To respond to this, Jonas said that “life can be known only by life”.⁶⁶ He believes that all living systems without exception have *inwardness*. Thompson concurs, and he adds to this that autopoiesis is that which in one stroke gives rise to inwardness and outwardness.⁶⁷ Thus all life has interiority (coupled with exteriority), which is the domain of selfhood and sense-making. According to Thompson, this interior domain (inwardness) is the precursor to the “interiority of consciousness”.⁶⁸

To say that “life can be known only by life” is a transcendental proposal made from a phenomenological point view.⁶⁹ It recognises the inwardness of life, and that life cannot be accounted for as a purely “external” phenomenon (from a purely third-person point of view). Thus to speak about the interior domain of a living being already represents a perspective that defies an objectivist view of nature purged of subjectivity. In Thompson’s view, when we recognise the inwardness of life in such a way that it cannot be captured by a “purely external conception”, then this inwardness is what underlies his idea of a “deep continuity of life and mind”.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁶⁶ Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 91.

⁶⁷ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 163.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 225.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 164.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 224-225.

At this point, Thompson does not seek to answer the unsolved problem of how sentience (i.e., the feeling of being alive, and the ability to feel one's body and recognise the presence of the world) arises. However, he points out that we can only understand how lived subjectivity emerges from a living being on the basis of a notion of living being that is already constituted by inwardness (interiority), which cannot be captured by a purely external and objectivist account. Thus Thompson holds that consciousness has an irreducibly transcendental status (phenomenologically speaking) in addition to an empirical one.⁷¹

Because consciousness is irreducible, Thompson argues that we need to expand our definition of the "physical" and recontextualise our idea of the "body". As Thompson says, "life is not physical in the standard material sense."⁷² One move that Thompson makes to remedy this is to substitute the term "physical" with the term "body", because it represents a living organism that has life, and such cannot be confined to the notion of the "physical", as it is conceived in the Cartesian framework.⁷³

To approach the subject of the body differently, then, phenomenologists distinguish two senses of the body: first, the body can be disclosed to us as a material thing (*Körper*); second, the body can be a lived body (*Leib*), that is, something that we subjectively experience being.⁷⁴ Thompson acknowledges that there is a sense of discontinuity when we move from the view of the body as a living body (autonomous structures that stand in a cognitive relation to an environment via a domain of possible interaction it itself specifies) to the view of the body as a lived body (the interior domain of sentience and intentional activity).⁷⁵ However, Thompson believes that this gap is no longer as formidable as the classical Cartesian gap that exists between two radically different ontologies of the mental and the physical, because (i) the gap is between two types of only one category of

⁷¹ Ibid., 239.

⁷² Ibid., 238.

⁷³ Ibid., 235.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 235.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 236-237.

embodiment; and (ii) to formulate the distinction as laid out above, we have to make reference to the common denominators of life and living beings.⁷⁶

Thompson believes that the move from the living body to the lived body is one in which the lived body is the living body, but enacted in its living. From this follows that the challenge for the enactive approach is “to understand a lived body as a special kind of autonomous system, one whose sense-making brings forth, enacts, or constitutes a phenomenological world”.⁷⁷ In what follows, then, I will discuss how the enactive approach attempts to account for subjectivity as a bodily phenomenon.

1.2.3 *The Dynamic Sensorimotor (Enactive) Approach and Bodily Self-awareness*

Biological autonomy entails that we relate to our environment in terms of our own dynamic sensorimotor constitution, i.e. our lived body; however, we must appreciate that we encounter our environment through our bodily subjectivity without it being an object of our experience. Rather, it constitutes our experience and is implicit in our encounter of the world.⁷⁸

When we consider the lived body as a vehicle through which we engage with our environment (i.e., embodied action), Thompson reminds us that we need to consider two important things.⁷⁹ First, our bodily subjectivity functions as an indexical frame of reference, a “null point of orientation”, which enables things to present themselves to a perspectival first-person point of view. Second, our lived body does not realise this function by virtue of being an intentional object of our experience (it is not the body-as-object). To the contrary, it is innate to our “motor intentionality”⁸⁰ and as such enables it, rather than being itself

⁷⁶ Ibid., 237, 244.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 237.

⁷⁸ Evan Thompson, Dan Zahavi, Georges B. J. Dreyfus, and John Dunne. “The Reflective Self: Questions and Answers, Part I (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008).” <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2369129033678559744&hl=en&emb=1#docid=6084386910063768436> (accessed July 31, 2010).

⁷⁹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 248-249.

⁸⁰ “Motor intentionality” is a term used by Merleau-Ponty to refer to a kind of bodily intentionality, that is, the way the body skillfully copes through activity and in this way relates to the world. It is not purely sensory nor

disclosed by it (it is the body-as-subject).

Once we take into account that our bodily subjectivity is indexical and implicit in our experience, we can appreciate Thompson's idea that "perceptual experience involves a non-object-directed and implicit awareness of one's lived body, an intransitive and prereflective bodily self-awareness."⁸¹ This bodily self-awareness is most of the time not present as an object in our experience, but tacitly present in the background, non-thematically. Sartre describes this form of implicit self-consciousness as "non-positional".⁸²

Thompson believes that perceptual experience ought to be explicated via a "dynamic sensorimotor approach"⁸³ that is (i) supported by an enactive account of selfhood (i.e., autonomous systems, which we have already discussed) and (ii) enriched by an account of pre-reflective bodily self-awareness.⁸⁴

An enactive account of selfhood is needed, because perceptual experience implies sensorimotor knowledge, and Thompson believes that such requires "a knower or agent or self that embodies this knowledge".⁸⁵ An account of pre-reflective bodily-awareness is also needed, because this kind of agency entails the first-personal givenness of experience and the presence of "ipseity" (I-ness) that constitutes this subjectivity.⁸⁶ Husserl also believed that

reflexive, but mainly bodily and skillful. It is through this motor intentionality that the body positions itself in the world and functions in it. See M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 110, 137; For a discussion of this idea in the context of the enactive approach see Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 247, 312-317.

⁸¹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 249.

⁸² J.-P Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by H. E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), liii.

⁸³ The "dynamic sensorimotor approach" is a recent development in cognitive science that attempts to draw on more resources to explain perceptual experience. In such a view, consciousness is not merely an intrinsic property of the brain (e.g. neural activity), but a structure or comportment that is attuned to the world via broader dynamic relations that is made up of neural activity, the body, and the world. This also includes an account of motor intentionality (defined in fn. 80.). See Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 80, 240.

⁸⁴ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 260.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 260-261. For a more extensive treatment of subjectivity and first-personal givenness see Dan Zahavi, Dan Zahavi, "Intentionality and Phenomenality: A Phenomenological Take on the Hard Problem," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, Research Library (2003): 79-82; and Dan Zahavi, "First-Person Thoughts and

such bodily self-awareness was a necessary condition of possibility for our perceiving and interacting with the world (“spatial”⁸⁷ objects).⁸⁸

This means that we need to explain “transitive”⁸⁹ perceptual-experiences-of-something in a way that also takes into account that such perceptual experiences are “intransitively” self-aware; they have first-personal givenness (being perspectival and given to “me” as “my experience” through an indexical “point of departure”). Hence Thompson concludes that a complete theory of perceptual experience includes a satisfying account of pre-reflective bodily self-consciousness, which is an intransitive, non-objectifying, and non-thematic condition that is part and parcel of our intentional mental acts.⁹⁰

It is clear that at this point the so-called “body-body” problem resurfaces: How can we move from a living body to the lived body?⁹¹ Thompson believes that this gap can be methodologically bridged via a dynamic sensorimotor approach to perceptual experience that includes (i) an enactive view of selfhood (which I already discussed) and (ii) a phenomenological account of self-awareness.

In Thompson’s view, the enactive approach (via neurophenomenology) unifies these two important components, because it links the mind sciences and phenomenology in a

Embodied Self-awareness: Some Reflections on the Relation Between Recent Analytical Philosophy and Phenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002): 13-17, 20.

⁸⁷ If we accept a Cartesian model of reality, then a spatial object is one that has properties that can be identified in spatial terms: they have dimensionality. This stands in contrast to, for example, the mental domain or thoughts, which have no such properties. This is also the foundation of decisive critiques of dualism: How can something that has no spatial characteristics (the soul) interact with something that can be located in space (the body)?

⁸⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana. Vol. 14, Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjectivität II* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 540; and Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana, Vol 4., Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie II* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1952), 56.

⁸⁹ The term “transitive” describes experiences that have a dualistic, subject-object structure. “Intransitively” structured experiences in contrast do not display such a severed structure. These terms receive more attention in Chapter 2.

⁹⁰ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 265.

⁹¹ Robert Hanna and Evan Thompson, “The Mind-Body-Body Problem,” *Theoria et Historia Scientiarum: International Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies* 7 (2003): 29-34. Montero engages in a related discussion on the “body problem” that calls into question our current understanding of the physical and thus also our understanding of the nature of the body itself. Montero shows that this issue is a priority and should be resolved before we raise questions about the “mind-body” problem. See Barbara Montero, “Post-Physicalism,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8:2 (2001): 61-62, 74-76, 78; and Barbara Montero, “The Body Problem,” *Noûs* 33:2 (1999): 183, 186

“mutually illuminating way”.⁹² In the next section, I will build on the ideas presented so far and focus on how phenomenologists think about self-awareness. I will then discuss how Thompson intends to theoretically account for self-awareness with the help of the neurophenomenological paradigm.

1.3 Self-awareness: The Subjective Principle of Consciousness

The notion of self-awareness points to the feature of our experience that is conscious in its most basic sense. By this I mean that experience does not happen in a vacuum, but is consciously lived-through by us and as “ours”. Conscious experience is thus necessarily and pre-reflectively self-aware. It is built into subjective experience.⁹³ We are also not only aware of the intentional objects of our experience, but we are also aware of features of our experience, namely the ongoing activity of the experiencing itself and what it is like.⁹⁴ Sartre explained this phenomenon as follows: “Every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself.”⁹⁵ Let us look at some examples that illustrate this subjective principle of consciousness.

Consider the case of visual experience. You see a bunch of flowers standing on the dinner table. In this act you are visually aware of the bunch of flowers; however, you also experience your seeing. This aware experiencing is innate to the experience. It is an implicit component that does not require reflection, i.e. it is pre-reflective and inbuilt.

Now consider a case in which you try to recall the experience of seeing the bunch of flowers a few days later. You re-present the experience in your mind by calling forth the image from memory. In this case, you will notice that the two instances have different

⁹² Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 265.

⁹³ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 15.

⁹⁴ Dan Zahavi, “First-Person Thoughts and Embodied Self-awareness: Some Reflections on the Relation Between Recent Analytical Philosophy and Phenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002): 13.

⁹⁵ J.-P Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by H. E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), liii.

qualitative features. In the first instance, when you visually experience the bunch of flowers, it presents itself to you effortlessly and spontaneously. In the second instance, when you re-present the image from memory, the experience requires more effort, it is not spontaneous and will demand a lot more focused attention. In this example, we notice that our intentional experiences have different features that change the way it is for us to live through them. This aspect corresponds to the intentional quality of an experience (the way living through an experience is like for us) that is present alongside the intentional matter of experience (what the experience is about, the object).⁹⁶

Another example is the case of lucid dreaming that makes salient the waking/dreaming contrast.⁹⁷ It does this because in these experiences, subjects become aware that they are in a dream state with more or less stability – sometimes also with control over the dream content. As Thompson and Dunne argue, what is important about these occurrences is that they force us to distinguish between awareness and the contents of awareness, that is, “awareness qua awareness” and “awareness qua content”.⁹⁸ In strong cases of lucid dreaming subjects are aware of the contents of their dreaming as changing; however, they are also “aware of the dream state as a state”.⁹⁹ This shows that we cannot equate awareness with the contents of awareness. Thus experience is not “transparent” or “diaphanous”,¹⁰⁰ contrary to the claims of

⁹⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 285-286.

⁹⁷ Evan Thompson, Dan Zahavi, Georges B. J. Dreyfus, John Dunne, “The Reflective Self: Questions and Answers, Part I (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2369129033678559744&hl=en&emb=1#docid=6084386910063768436> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 17:40-20:50.

⁹⁸ This distinction can also be connected to Albahari’s discussion of a “witnessing awareness” that remains as a stable and invariant background to the passing and changing contents of experience. Albahari further holds that this observer-witness (quality) is the *modus operandi* of the subject and the locus of the first-person perspective on the world. In her view, this capacity makes “the subject of experience subjective” and in this sense conscious. See Miri Albahari, *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 36, 88-90.

⁹⁹ Evan Thompson, Dan Zahavi, Georges B. J. Dreyfus, John Dunne, “The Reflective Self: Questions and Answers, Part I (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2369129033678559744&hl=en&emb=1#docid=6084386910063768436> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 18:42-18:44.

¹⁰⁰ The notions “transparent” and “diaphanous” are employed by adherents of representationalism to describe the view that the phenomenal quality of our experience is completely exhausted by its representational

many representationalists. Rather, it is aware of the mode in which experiencing is occurring (pre-reflectively self-aware).¹⁰¹ Consequently, this implicit awareness, which is a kind of self-consciousness,¹⁰² allows us to be aware of constitutive features of our experience. We are pre-reflectively *state aware*.

Our inbuilt pre-reflective self-awareness of experiencing also allows us to attend to features of our experience and in this way become aware of them.¹⁰³ This feature-awareness is not the same as simply directing our attention to the objects of our experience. We can be aware of what there is to see (e.g., the bunch of flowers), but we can also pay attention to how this act of seeing feels, or how this seeing is experienced by us. This capacity enables us to become aware of features of our experience that are normally not a part of our conscious experience (they are implicit and pre-reflective). Aspects of our experience that were

content. In this way, our experience consists only of what it is about; there are no additional features. Thus, when we introspect our experience of blue, for example, then all we can see is the blue; there is no additional quality to our experience apart from this blue content. This view can be traced back to Moore, but it is also endorsed by others, such as Tye, Lycan, Dretske and Harman. See G. E. Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," in *G. E. Moore: Selected Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1993), 23-44. See also Michael Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness: A Representational Theory of the Phenomenal Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT/Bradford, 1995), 45; Michael Tye, "Inverted Earth, Swampman, and Representationism," *Philosophical Perspectives 12: Language, Mind, and Ontology* (1998): 459; Michael Tye, "Qualia," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qualia/> (Accessed 24 August 2009); William Lycan, "The Case for Phenomenal Externalism," *Philosophical Perspectives 15, Metaphysics* (2001): 17-23, William Lycan, "Representational Theories of Consciousness," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness-representational/> (Accessed 24 August 2009); Fred Dretske, "Experience as Representation," *Philosophical Issues 13, Philosophy of Mind* (2003): 68-74; Gilbert Harman, "The Intrinsic Quality of Experience," *Philosophical Perspectives 4, Action Theory and Philosophy of Mind* (1990): 31-34. To review discussions of this "transparency thesis" and criticisms thereof see Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 267-303; Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 117-119; Amy Kind, "Restrictions on Representationalism," *Philosophical Studies* (2007): 405-408; and Dan Zahavi, "Intentionality and Phenomenality: A Phenomenological Take on the Hard Problem," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy 29, Research Library* (2003): 72-82.

¹⁰¹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 282-287.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 286.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

unthematic and in the background are now made explicit, thematised, and brought to the foreground of our conscious experience.¹⁰⁴

1.3.1 *Self-awareness and Time-Consciousness*

Phenomenologists hold that there is a close connection between self-awareness, bodily awareness, and time-consciousness.

First, intentional experiences are constituted by a pre-reflective self-awareness. They are first-personal (given to “me”) and have a distinctive way of being lived-through – there is something it is like to undergo such experiences: they actually do phenomenally occur to a subject, and their phenomenology is one of being owned by, or belonging to, “them”.¹⁰⁵

Second, this implicit awareness is closely tied to our intransitive and direct acquaintance with our own bodily subjectivity, that is, our lived body functions as a “point of convergence of action and perception”¹⁰⁶ (the indexical “here”). This in turn is made possible through sensorimotor integration and the way in which the body’s “motor intentionality”¹⁰⁷ situates itself in and relates to the environment.¹⁰⁸ Our bodily self-awareness is therefore not an object-directed observation that takes yet another object as the focus of experience (as an image or a type of “object-consciousness”), but it is a non-observational and pre-reflective lived subjectivity *through which* the world and intentional objects are encountered.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 287.

¹⁰⁵ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 5-7; and Dan Zahavi, “Intentionality and Phenomenality: A Phenomenological Take on the Hard Problem,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, Research Library (2003): 77-82.

¹⁰⁶ Dorothee Legrand, “The Bodily Self: The Sensori-motor Roots of Pre-reflective Self-consciousness,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 5 (2006): 89-93; and Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 141-144.

¹⁰⁷ See fn. 80.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. See also Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 245-252, 312-317.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. See also Dan Zahavi, “First-Person Thoughts and Embodied self-awareness: Some Reflections on the Relation Between Recent Analytical Philosophy and Phenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002): 15-16, 20-21; and Dorothee Legrand, “The Bodily Self: The Sensori-motor Roots of Pre-reflective Self-consciousness,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 5 (2006): 93. Recall that Husserl also believed that such bodily self-awareness was a necessary condition of possibility for our perceiving and interacting with the world (spatial objects). See Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana. Vol. 14, Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjectivität II* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 540; and Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana, Vol 4,*

Third, our awareness of experience is unified across time. This includes the unity of our actions and their coherent phenomenal flow from one into another over time.¹¹⁰ Our awareness is thus experienced as an unbroken stream of experiencing.

The temporal and unified quality of our awareness-of-experiencing is referred to as “time-consciousness”. It comprises two components: (i) our awareness of “temporal”¹¹¹ objects; and (ii) our awareness of our own temporally extended experiencing. The former is identified as “outer” time-consciousness and the latter as “inner” time-consciousness.¹¹²

Husserl argued that consciousness must transcend the punctual now, and thereby be conscious of the immediate past and future to allow for a coherent flow of experiencing.¹¹³ For James, too, the basic unit of experienced time was not a “knife-edge” present, but a “duration- block”,¹¹⁴ which is a kind of temporal field that comprises present, past, and future modalities.¹¹⁵ Husserl tried to provide a structural analysis of such time-consciousness that consists of three intentional processes: primal impression (the “now-phase”), retention (the “just-elapsed phase”), and protention (the “just-about-to-occur phase”).¹¹⁶

We can envision this structure via the example of listening to a melody. In the now-phase of the melody we receive primal impressions of sounding notes that have no reference to past or future. In the just-elapsed phase, we continue to hear the notes that we just heard; however, we do so in a mode of them *having-past*. Subjectively, the note still sounds because it is intentionally present, even though it is not actually so. In the last, just-about-to-occur

Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie II (The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1952), 56.

¹¹⁰ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 312-314, 318.

¹¹¹ A “temporal” object is one that is experienced to have duration. It subsists throughout time and is as such temporally extended.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 318.

¹¹³ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 63.

¹¹⁴ William James, *The Principles of Psychology I-II* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1893), 609-610.

¹¹⁵ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 64.

¹¹⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 319. See also Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 64; and Dan Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 80-82.

phase, we are open to the horizon of our experiencing. This phase differs from the prior two in that it is empty, not filled by any determinate content of notes just occurring or being re-presented as just-past. It is a condition of anticipation.

In this way, Husserl (and James) account for the temporal width of our experience by integrating the just-past and the just-about-to-occur into the phenomenal flow of our streaming experience. According to Husserl, the unified operation of this threefold structure underlies our acquaintance with the present, which is an experience of the present moment as being temporally extended. Below is a schematic illustration of this threefold structure of time-consciousness:

Time-consciousness according to Husserl

To understand how time-consciousness allows us to experience in a unified way, we must come to appreciate how the “retentional continuum” holds primal impressions intentionally in our awareness, and allows them to gradually slip away as our conscious experience is re-supplied with new impressions. This retentional continuum, then, comprises the just-past phases of consciousness. It operates with the help of two kinds of intentional

operations.¹¹⁷

(i) The first intentional operation retains the phases of consciousness itself – the impressions, retentions, protentions – and it does so in a way that holds them properly connected to each other. To say that consciousness intentionally holds onto its just-past phases means that consciousness presents those phases to our awareness *as just-past*. We are therefore not speaking about retaining intentional objects, but about how consciousness retains conscious acts *as phases belonging to the just-past*. I shall call this operational feature “phase-retention” (notice the parallel here to “state-awareness” as discussed in the case of lucid dreaming).

(ii) The second intentional operation ensures that the intentional object itself is experienced as temporally extended; I shall call this “object-retention”. For this operation to be possible, however, intentional objects must be situated as belonging to previous phases of conscious acts (phase-retention). Thus Thompson points out that “to be aware of intentional objects across time, consciousness must also be retentionally aware of itself.”¹¹⁸ This means that apart from retaining objects, consciousness must also be related to itself, or in other words, consciousness must retain the sense of itself through time (phase-retention). In this way, our experiencing is constituted by the retention of just-past intentional objects by virtue of the retentional operations holding onto the just-past (phase-) experience as well.

We can see that self-consciousness is an inbuilt feature of the threefold structure of time-consciousness. If we reconsider the example of listening to a melody, we can say that our temporally extended hearing of a melody is accompanied by (or only possible because of) our awareness of our ongoing experience of this melody. According to Husserl, this kind of experiencing is made possible because of the threefold structure of time-consciousness. It entails a past-present-future continuum of experiencing in which we experience temporal

¹¹⁷ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 322.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

objects (intentional acts) while also being “implicitly co-aware” of our ongoing and temporally extended stream of experiencing.¹¹⁹

At this point of our analysis of time-consciousness we encounter a problem: If we wish to account for our capacity to coherently experience over time (e.g., a melody) with the help of the threefold structure of time-consciousness, then we must also account for our ability to experience those intentional mental acts themselves. According to Thompson, it is a given that we can become aware of our experiences (intentional acts) as unfolding in time. This, in turn, entails that they too have temporal character.¹²⁰ If we do not wish to invoke the threefold impression-retention-protention model again to explain our experience of intentional acts themselves, then we end up having to posit a further consciousness to account for coherence and duration of experience. This leads us into an infinite regress. How can we stop this regress?

The dominant interpretation of how Husserl responds to this issue tells us that he posited a further consciousness, which he called the “absolute consciousness” or “the absolute flow”.¹²¹ According to this account, the absolute consciousness denotes a deeper level of inner time-consciousness – a kind of “bedrock stratum” that is the a priori condition for any other form of consciousness – and is that by which intentional acts are brought to awareness.¹²²

This account of the absolute flow (also conceived as the deepest level of time-consciousness) encounters problems, however: it does not avoid the regress issue. Thompson raises two related questions in this respect (about absolute consciousness).¹²³

For one, is this absolute consciousness something we experience? If not, then the

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Dan Zahavi, “Inner Time-consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness,” in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 166.

¹²² Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 323.

¹²³ Ibid., 24.

notion would seem purely theoretical without much empirical support or intuitive plausibility. If we do experience the absolute flow, then how is this brought to our awareness? Again, we run into the problem of infinite regress.

Second, are our intentional experiences objects of our inner time-consciousness? Do we need to introduce a subject-object duality (transitive structure)? If so, what does this say about the relationship between time-consciousness and pre-reflective self-awareness (which is intransitive in structure)?

Thompson and Zahavi agree on the proper way to respond to these questions. They both conclude that time-consciousness is one and the same thing as pre-reflective self-awareness.¹²⁴ According to Zahavi, we actually find the most elaborate treatment of pre-reflective self-awareness in Husserl's analysis of inner time-consciousness.¹²⁵ To understand this, let us unpack their way of thinking about this issue and address the first question: Do we experience absolute consciousness, and if so, how?

According to Husserl, consciousness as a sheer flow is phenomenologically discernable if we attend to our experience with great care and phenomenological aptness (following the steps of the phenomenological method). This streaming consciousness is "absolute, ultimate, or original",¹²⁶ because it does not depend on any further condition of possibility. It is itself the deepest level. Thompson definitely supports this idea and agrees with Husserl that if we look close enough, we can phenomenologically identify

a flowing or streaming belonging to our consciousness that is distinct from the objects or contents of consciousness, that is, from whatever our experience is about or directed toward.¹²⁷

Zahavi concurs:

¹²⁴ Dan Zahavi, "Inner Time-consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness," in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 168; and Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 325-328.

¹²⁵ Dan Zahavi, "Inner Time-consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness," in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 164.

¹²⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 324.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Whereas we live through a number of different experiences, our self-awareness [the absolute flow of inner time-consciousness] remains as an unchanging dimension. It stands – to use the striking image of James – permanent, like the rainbow on the waterfall, with its own quality unchanged by the events that stream through it. In other words, it is highly appropriate [and experientially possible] to distinguish the strict singularity of the *lebendige Gegenwart* from the plurality of changing experiences.¹²⁸

Given, then, that Thompson and Zahavi interpret Husserl to have believed that we can become aware of absolute consciousness (the “living present”, or “standing-streaming”¹²⁹), how do Thompson and Zahavi avoid an infinite regress in their approach to Husserl’s absolute consciousness?

First, Thompson emphasises Husserl’s attempt to offer a plausible explanation of how the absolute flow is self-constituting with the help of its two intentional operations of object-retention and phase-retention (it not only retains the experience of external objects, but also the awareness of what the experience is like for us – the phase of the experience).

According to this account, the stream of consciousness retains and protends itself allowing the stream as a whole to be self-unifying. Thompson is quick to add that the absolute flow is *self-organising*, obviously attempting to further his project of closing the gap between (biologically) living systems – whose dynamic, self-organising network relations enable autonomy and define identity – and (phenomenologically) lived systems – whose dynamic, flowing threefold structure of time-consciousness is self-unifying and in this way, too, self-organising).¹³⁰

Second, Husserl argues that the absolute flow does not itself move in or through time. While the absolute flow does have a phenomenal temporality to it, it is itself not in time. In this way, it stands on its own terms as the living present. This living present is the standing-

¹²⁸ Dan Zahavi, “Inner Time-consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness,” in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 170.

¹²⁹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 326.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 324.

streaming that underlies all appearances of flow, without being subject to time. Thompson explains that this way of thinking about the absolute flow is phenomenological, because

we can distinguish within experience between what changes or varies and what remains invariant. The contents of the present moment – the particular things of which we are aware – arise and perish. But the present moment as a structure of awareness does not change or vary. No matter what we experience, it is always there, or rather always here. It is not a changing content of experience, but an unchanging structure of experience, the threefold structure of primal impression-retention-protention.¹³¹

James followed the same kind of phenomenological reasoning:

Into the awareness of the thunder itself the awareness of the previous silence creeps and continues; for what we hear when the thunder crashes is not thunder *pure*, but thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-with-it.¹³²

In these accounts of the stream of consciousness (the absolute flow), we can see how the flowing, ever-present background (that is an invariant condition of possibility) is distinguished from the changing contents of experience. The background is unchanging and unaffected, yet it is also the flow of *phenomenal* time, even if it is not in time itself. The absolute flow neither occurs *in* time nor moves *through* time, because it is the self-constituting flow of phenomenal time itself. All temporal predicates apply only to the temporally extended objects that are disclosed by this a priori condition, but not to the absolute flow itself, whereby we experience those temporal objects.¹³³

Third, Thompson and Zahavi both reject the problem of infinite regress with the help of an interesting response to the (second) question of whether intentional experiences are objects of our inner time-consciousness: they argue that this is not the case because absolute consciousness *is* pre-reflective self-awareness. In their view, this kind of self-awareness stops the infinite regress, because it is non-objectifying and intransitive (not of a subject-object structure).

¹³¹ Ibid., 326.

¹³² William James, *The Principles of Psychology I* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1893), 240.

¹³³ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 325.

To illustrate what is meant by this, Thompson offers two examples. First, absorbed skillful activity does not have a subject-object structure; rather, it is an “immediate coupling” or “dynamic attunement” with the environment.¹³⁴ Second, when we listen to a melody, at least in the case of absorbed or immersed listening, then our listening does not objectify experience. There is neither a thematic awareness of the melody as an object distinct from the subject, nor is there a thematic awareness of the act of listening itself. According to Thompson, we misdescribe our experience if we say that we experience our listening as a kind of internal temporal object that is distinct from our hearing of the melody.¹³⁵

In their view, our experience of our listening is an intransitive (non-object-directed) and unthematic component of our experience. If we believe that the experience of our listening is one that is of an inner temporal object, then this amounts to believing that our hearing the melody is a transitive act that goes hand in hand with being transitively aware of our listening. However, if we look at our experience with a careful phenomenological eye, then we must acknowledge that our experience of our listening is pre-reflective, intransitive, and non-thematic instead of reflective, transitive, and thematic.¹³⁶

Our listening to the melody, then, comprises two aspects: (i) the hearing of the melody itself in a transitive way; and (ii) our subjectivity that lives through our listening in an intransitive way. To live through our listening in this way means that in our listening there is inbuilt a component that immediately manifests our experience to us without the help of reflection or observation. This inbuilt, subjective component is the first-personal quality of our experience that is implicit and not a type of object-consciousness.¹³⁷ As Zahavi says, this

¹³⁴ Ibid., 312-315, 326.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 327.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid. See also Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 153-155.

component “belongs intrinsically to the innermost structure of the act itself.”¹³⁸ Thus the subjectivity of experience is its intrinsic, non-object-directed, and pre-reflective self-awareness.

Both Zahavi and Thompson agree that for us to experience temporal objects, consciousness must be aware of itself across time. Zahavi points out that Husserl’s account of time-consciousness, and its threefold structure of impression-retention-protention, is nothing else than an analysis of the structure of pre-reflective self-awareness (the inbuilt self-aware quality of our acts and experiences).¹³⁹

In their view, this fundamental idea that “inner time-consciousness is nothing other than prereflective self-awareness”¹⁴⁰ stops the infinite regress, because our intentional experiences are decidedly not objects of our inner time-consciousness (or self-awareness), but they are implicitly self-aware without a subject-object structure. This means that self-awareness does not stand outside of our experience as some distinct and separate condition that itself requires yet another awareness.¹⁴¹ To the contrary, as Zahavi argues, this self-awareness of experience “is an internal, non-reflective, irrelational feature of the experience itself, and thus the regress is stopped.” To underwrite this, I offer some additional evidence of Thompson’s and Zahavi’s position on this.

Thompson states:¹⁴²

The structure of inner time-consciousness – primal impression-retention-protention – is exactly the structure of prereflective self-awareness and also precisely the absolute flow.

Zahavi states:¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Dan Zahavi, “Inner Time-consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness,” in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 168.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 328.

¹⁴¹ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 54.

¹⁴² Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 328.

The absolute flow of experiencing simply is the pre-reflective self-manifestation of our experiences.

Inner time-consciousness simply is the name of the pre-reflective self-awareness of our experiences.

Inner time-consciousness is the pre-reflective self-awareness of the act.

If self-awareness is understood in terms of this threefold structure of time-consciousness, and time-consciousness is understood in terms of the inbuilt and pre-reflective nature of self-awareness in intentional experience, then the notion of absolute consciousness does indeed end the regress. Our subjectivity of experience, then, is retentionally aware of itself over time through the threefold structure of impression-retention-protention. This structure in turn entails intransitive self-awareness, which does not objectify our intentional experiences, but lives through them immediately and pre-reflectively.

1.4 Neurophenomenology: Self-awareness and the Methodological Remedy

I promised that I would discuss how Varela and Thompson intend to account for *inner* consciousness (i.e., self-awareness or time-consciousness) with the help of neurophenomenology. I will do so now.

Recall that Thompson believes that the gap between living systems and lived systems (life and mind) can be methodologically bridged via (i) an enactive view of selfhood and (ii) a phenomenological account of self-awareness. I have already discussed the phenomenological underpinnings of the notion of self-awareness; now I will draw on this to explicate how neurophenomenology intends to account for self-awareness.

To begin with, our phenomenological discussion has shown that phenomenologists, including Thompson, equate self-awareness and time-consciousness. Furthermore, they believe that an analysis of time-consciousness is nothing but a structural account of self-

¹⁴³ Dan Zahavi, "Inner Time-consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness," in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 168.

awareness.¹⁴⁴ Since an analysis of time-consciousness yields a threefold dynamic structure of impression-retention-protention, neurophenomenology compares this to the enactive view of selfhood (a dynamic sensorimotor approach) and the dynamic, self-organising network of living systems.

Varela's strategy is to develop dynamic models of the structural invariants that represent "a common structural level of description that capture[s] the dynamics of both the impressional-retentional-protentional flow of time-consciousness and the large scale neural processes thought to be associated with consciousness."¹⁴⁵ In Thompson's view, it is clear that time-consciousness is self-constituting, and it is the task of neurophenomenology to demonstrate how this dynamic, self-organising structure of time-consciousness is mirrored on the biological level of living systems, which are also dynamic and self-organising (autonomous).¹⁴⁶ In this way, time-consciousness is considered to be "an acid test of the entire neurophenomenological enterprise."¹⁴⁷

Let us take a step back and talk about what neurophenomenology is, so that we can appreciate just how exactly this research program promises to mirror phenomenology in biology.

Neurophenomenology is a research program for the scientific study of consciousness, first put forward by the late Francisco Varela in the 1990s.¹⁴⁸ Within the context of cognitive neuroscience, this program places importance on the rigorous collection of first-person data

¹⁴⁴ Dan Zahavi, "Inner Time-consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness," in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 164.

¹⁴⁵ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 329.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Francisco J. Varela, "The Specious Present: A Neurophenomenology of Time Consciousness," in *Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, eds. J. Petitot, F. J. Varela, B. Pachoud, and J.-M. Roy (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 267.

¹⁴⁸ In one of Varela's publications in the *Journal of Consciousness* (1996) he states: "Neuro-phenomenology is the name I am using here to designate a quest to marry modern cognitive science and a disciplined approach to human experience, thus placing myself in the lineage of the continental tradition of phenomenology." See Varela, Francisco J. "Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy of the Hard Problem." In *Explaining Consciousness: The "Hard Problem"*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 337.

from phenomenologically trained subjects for the purpose of studying the neural dynamics of consciousness. This is intended as a heuristic strategy.¹⁴⁹ The turn to phenomenology – and first-person methods more broadly considered – is pragmatic, not theoretic. According to Lutz, when we think about this from an experimental point of view, this denotes a going beyond “the just-take-a-look attitude”¹⁵⁰ in respect to our experience.

With the integration of first-person methods into experimental research on consciousness, Varela formulates the “working hypothesis” of neurophenomenology:

Phenomenological accounts of the structure of experience and their counterparts in cognitive science relate to each other through reciprocal constraints.¹⁵¹

What Varela means by “reciprocal constraints” is that phenomenological analysis of (the structure of) experience can inform scientific research of consciousness, and that in turn scientific discoveries can inform phenomenological work on consciousness.¹⁵² In this way, precise first-person data constrains analytic and interpretive work on physiological processes, and vice versa.¹⁵³

To this end, neurophenomenology synthesises three domains of knowledge.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Robert Hanna and Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology and the Spontaneity of Consciousness,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29 (2003): 140-141.

¹⁵⁰ Neurophenomenology distinguishes itself from other neuroscience research programs because it turns to practitioners that are well trained in first-person methods, or at least front loads phenomenology into the experiments, such that the subjects that partake in their research can reliably identify their own cognitive contexts. This goes well beyond relying on amateurs (e.g. untrained undergraduate students) for first-person data collection. Antoine Lutz, “Introduction – the Explanatory Gap: To Close or to Bridge?” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 328.

¹⁵¹ Francisco J. Varela, “Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy of the Hard Problem,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The “Hard Problem”*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 351.

¹⁵² Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 329. For a more detailed explication of what “reciprocal constraints” entail see Antoine Lutz, “Introduction – the Explanatory Gap: To Close or to Bridge?” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 328-329; and Antoine Lutz and Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology: Integrating Subjective Experience and Brain Dynamics in the Neuroscience of Consciousness,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10:9-10 (2003): 33.

¹⁵³ Antoine Lutz, “Introduction – the Explanatory Gap: To Close or to Bridge?” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 328. Gallagher and Varela suggest that to view phenomenology and the cognitive sciences as mutually constraining is also one way of going about naturalising phenomenology. See Shaun Gallagher and Francisco J. Varela, “Redrawing the Map and Resetting the Time: Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29 (2003): 98.

¹⁵⁴ Antoine Lutz and Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology: Integrating Subjective Experience and Brain Dynamics in the Neuroscience of Consciousness,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10:9-10 (2003): 34; Evan

(NPh1) phenomenological analysis of the structure of experience, that is, data from first-person methods;

(NPh2) models derived from dynamic systems theory for these structures that have been disclosed by first-person methods;

(NPh3) empirical experimentation to realise these models in (biologically) living systems through measurements of brain processes relevant to consciousness.

Thus far, I have talked a lot about (1), especially about the dynamic, self-constitutive, threefold structure of time-consciousness (as an analysis of the structure of self-awareness). I have also introduced some basic concepts about living systems as they are understood by Maturana and Varela and other thinkers in the philosophy of biology. Living systems, in their view, are cognitive and autonomous systems that realise their autonomy through dynamic, mutually supportive networks that are operationally closed. In both the case of (phenomenal) self-awareness and of (biologically) living systems we find self-organisation. According to neurophenomenology, the phenomenal and the biological can be brought into a “reflective equilibrium” through dynamic systems theory, because it can conceptually re-describe both autonomous domains.¹⁵⁵

Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 329; and Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 33.

¹⁵⁵ I have adapted Thompson’s “Figure 11.2. Neurophenomenology” for my own purposes. It is derived from Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 330.

When we consider the task of neurophenomenology to account for self-awareness in this way, we see that the acid test depends on whether or not phenomenological accounts of time-consciousness and *neurodynamical* accounts of processes in the brain can be mutually illuminated. Therefore, the self-constituting stream of time-consciousness has to be mirrored at the biological level through the self-organising dynamics of living systems (in this specific case, neural activity).¹⁵⁶ Thus the aim of neurophenomenology is to explain how the standing-streaming of consciousness (the temporal, flowing structure of our experience) is realised in the dynamics of biological processes.¹⁵⁷ For Thompson, neurophenomenology is just one such way

to naturalize the phenomenological account of time-consciousness by redescribing the structure of time-consciousness in the language of dynamic systems theory and mapping this description onto biological processes going on in the brain.¹⁵⁸

What is important to understand here is simply the following: The neurophenomenological approach rests on the framework of dynamic systems theory to develop common structural levels of description between phenomenal and biological processes (systems) to bridge the gap between life (the living domain) and mind (the phenomenal domain).

I believe to be able to present an interesting (and empirically promising) challenge for this research program by considering phenomenological accounts of self-awareness from contemplative phenomenologists. I will discuss how these accounts bring into question the continental analysis of self-awareness as time-consciousness, and in this way show that life and mind may not share this *strong* continuity that Thompson suggests after all: the contemplative mind and life may not have in common a (dynamical) pattern or organisation, continental phenomenology and neurophenomenology to the contrary. Therefore, the crucial pillar on which neurophenomenology rests, that is, dynamic systems theory, may actually be

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 329.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 334.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 338.

ill-suited as a bridging strategy.¹⁵⁹

Before putting forward the challenging accounts of contemplative phenomenologists (in Chapter 6), I will explore the rather vast plateau of consensus that exists between myself

¹⁵⁹ The neurophenomenological enterprise invites criticism, some of which are well founded:

First, Bayne has questioned the bridging strategy of this research program, and whether it offers anything more than straight forward isomorphism (a one-to-one correlation between phenomenology and biology) because it simply draws on dynamical models to describe both domains. See Tim Bayne, "Closing the Gap? Some Questions for Neurophenomenology," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 355-359. For further critique of phenomenology see Morten Overgaard, "On the Naturalising of Phenomenology," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 365-379.

Thompson tries to respond to this by first admitting that a lot of the hypotheses in neurophenomenological work have so far been "undeniably... isomorphic in form", but we should conceive this strategy as a heuristic one, that is, as a working tool to guide neuroscientific research. This means that neurophenomenology operates within a nonreductive framework that integrates phenomenology in such a way that our very understanding of nature is transformed. Thus, the physicalist approach that objectifies nature no longer holds sway. Furthermore, neurophenomenology also aims to go beyond structural isomorphism to phenomenologically acknowledge the "inner life of biological systems". See Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 357-359.

For Bayne, this is both a satisfying and unsatisfying response. On the one hand, Bayne agrees that what is important is that "the subject's *phenomenal* reports" in Lutz's studies "guide[d] the analysis of the *neuroscientific* data...this is, I think, a fascinating result."¹⁵⁹ He also says: "While Lutz and co-workers didn't use neuronal data as a heuristic in the discovery of phenomenological structure, I can see nothing to stop a research team attempting to employ such a method. I think this is an important study." This is to say that Bayne agrees on the heuristic function of the neurophenomenological bridging strategy.

On the other hand (coming to the second criticism from above), Bayne promptly adds that "this study no more illuminates the relationship between biophysical properties and phenomenal properties than any other work on the neural correlates of consciousness does; which is to say that it doesn't. The gap... remains as wide as ever." In this way Bayne ends his critique of neurophenomenology by concluding that the heuristic "is an excellent model of how the science of consciousness ought to proceed. But neither it nor any other experimental work conducted by neurophenomenologists lives up to the bold claims made by its proponents [i.e., that it is a remedy to the hard problem of consciousness]. How it is that anything so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about as a result of irritating nervous tissue is still as remarkable as the appearance of Djinn when Aladdin rubbed his lamp." See Tim Bayne, "Closing the gap? Some questions for neurophenomenology," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 358-361

In response, Thompson points out that Varela's paper on neurophenomenology in 1996 was driven by the insight that no purely third-person approach can bridge this gap. Thus, Varela offered a "methodological remedy" for this, but it was not his intent to solve the metaphysical hard problem on its own terms. Rather, Varela wishes to recast the terms in which the hard problem is stated. Through a phenomenological approach, then, the Cartesian framework of "mental" versus "physical" is recontextualised in terms of the "body" (independent of the vague notion of the "physical"). Thus, Thompson insists on a conceptual shift that we have already spoken about earlier: he relies on the phenomenological distinction between the body as a material thing ("*Körper*") and a subjectively lived being ("*Leib*"). In this way, Thompson believes that the gap is no longer absolute, because on both sides we need to make common reference to *life*. For Thompson, then, the neurophenomenological enterprise is not a way to address the Cartesian hard problem, but a way "to understand the *emergence of living subjectivity from living being, including the reciprocal shaping of living being by living subjectivity*. It is this issue of *emergence* that neurophenomenology addresses, not the Cartesian version of the hard problem."

According to Thompson, it is implicit in this idea of emergence, and the attempt to recast the whole way of thinking about the hard problem, that there is a "strong continuity of life and mind". By this he means that life and mind "share a common pattern or organization", which is to say that both their structural organisations are dynamic and autonomous. In this way, "mind is life-like, and life is mind-like;" in his boldest statement, Thompson says, "*Living is cognition*." See Evan Thompson, "Life and Mind: From Autopoiesis to Phenomenology. A Tribute to Francisco Varela," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 358-359, 383-385; and Antoine Lutz, "Introduction – The Explanatory Gap: To Close or to Bridge?" *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 326-327.

and continental phenomenology. The aim of this is to show that we agree on a number of important points, namely: (i) that there are experiences with different structures; (ii) that “cognitive access” to our conscious life is a matter of thematising experience; and (iii) that we have such cognitive access to the intentional domain of consciousness. Once I have outlined this common ground, I will put forward a view of cognitive access on the basis of contemplative phenomenology that allows us to thematise self-awareness as well, a possibility which prominent continental phenomenologists deny. This will prepare us for the phenomenological data of a type of experience that presents a profound challenge for continental phenomenologists and Thompson’s project to account for continuity between life and mind.

Chapter 2

Structures of Experience: Intentionality, the Mind-World Relation, and Self-awareness

That not all experiences are intentional is proved by sensations and sensational complexes.¹⁶⁰

Edmund Husserl

We are aware of what we experience without using introspection precisely because we have an implicit, non-objectifying, pre-reflective awareness of our own experience as we live it through... the awareness in question is not based on reflectively or introspectively turning our attention to our own experience. It is, rather, built into our experience as an essential part of it, and it is precisely this which defines our experiences as conscious experience.¹⁶¹

Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi

This chapter will discuss basic phenomenological ideas about the structure of experience and the plateau of consensus that exists between my views and that of continental phenomenology. The main point I will make is that I agree with representatives of continental phenomenology on the fact that there are experiences with different structures. While we have a lot of common ground, however, we also disagree on one crucial point, namely to what extent we can expand the list of different types of experience. I disagree with continental phenomenology on the particular issue of whether or not subjectivity can be self-enclosed. This disagreement decides to a large degree whether or not the enactive paradigm can account for continuity between life and mind.

In this chapter, I begin by introducing the phenomenological concept of intentionality, and I will discuss how intentionality connects subjectivity with the world. This is necessary for three reasons: (i) through understanding intentionality we come to understand how phenomenologists think about the structure of experience; (ii) when we consider

¹⁶⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations I-II*, trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2001), 556.

¹⁶¹ Gallagher and Zahavi discuss this issue of syntax in Sartre's work in greater detail. See Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 15.

intentionality in this way, we discover that there are different types of intentionality (narrow and broad), which (iii) are important concepts to explain how phenomenologists think about self-awareness and the possible types of experience.

Next, I will present how continental phenomenologists conceive the relationship between intentionality and self-awareness. The conclusion they come to re-affirms that subjectivity is never self-enclosed but always open towards alterity (otherness). Thus I will leave behind the plateau of consensus with continental phenomenologists, because this conclusion excludes an important type of experience (which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 6).

Finally I will outline different types of experience that can be distinguished on the basis of our treatment of intentionality and self-awareness. I will also put forward an additional type of experience that continental phenomenologists have heretofore denied, because they have relied on philosophical analysis above practical expertise to examine conscious experience. I will conclude this chapter by reviewing the ground I share with continental phenomenology and point out how we disagree on the nature of subjectivity. In the chapters that follow, I will argue for my own view in greater detail.

2.1 Intentionality: The Objective Principle of Consciousness

I agree with continental phenomenologists that to discuss intentionality is in part to discuss the nature of the mind itself, because intentionality is rightfully considered to be one of the central “structural” features of the mind (I emphasise the point “one of”; it is not “the” central feature). When phenomenologists talk about intentionality within the context of the mind, it is important not to confuse the word with its ordinary meaning of “intention”, which is a volitional phenomenon of the human psyche (i.e., “to have a purpose in mind when acting”),

and does not in itself explain any essential structural feature of the mind.¹⁶² Intentionality for our purpose describes a structural feature of consciousness and how the mind discloses phenomena to our experience. The etymology of intentionality indicates what is meant by this: it means to attend to or point to a target, as with a bow (the term is derived from the Latin verb *tendere*).¹⁶³ Thus the mind is understood to direct itself towards the objects it discloses to the subject, and in this way, it is conceived to point beyond itself and to “transcend”¹⁶⁴ itself.¹⁶⁵

Phenomenologists speak about intentional experiences by referring to mental or intentional *acts*, in other words, acts of perceiving like remembering and imagining. This conceives our mental life to be a dynamic process of consecutive intentional acts, energised by a kind of intentional striving that finds fulfilment when the intentional objects are disclosed to the subject. In this context, intentionality is a kind of impersonal and non-volitional striving, being a function of the mind to disclose that which transcends (is exterior to) the subjectivity of the subject.¹⁶⁶

2.1.1 *The Correlational Structure and the “World”*

If we understand our mental life to be governed by mental acts that are the very acts they are because of the objects they intend, then it follows that for us to properly conceive intentionality, we cannot consider mental acts or the objects they intend in isolation.

Intentionality, then, necessarily has a correlational structure.¹⁶⁷ From the viewpoint of continental phenomenology, this correlational structure describes the invariant architecture of

¹⁶² Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 22-24; and Pierre Jacop, “Intentionality,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/intentionality/> (accessed July 24, 2009).

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ In this context “transcend” indicates that which is exterior to or outside of the subject. It points to that which cannot be encompassed by the interiority of its identity: it extends beyond its own boundaries. See also fn. 46.

¹⁶⁵ Dan Zahavi, “Intentionality and Phenomenality: A Phenomenological Take on the Hard Problem,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, Research Library (2003): 73-74.

¹⁶⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 24.

¹⁶⁷ Donn Welton, *The Other Husserl: The Horizons of Transcendental Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 17.

our mental life, the way it is structurally constituted and made up.

In the phenomenological language of Husserl, the two poles of intentional act and intentional object are called “noesis” and “noema”: the noesis-noema correlation.¹⁶⁸ The term noesis denotes the mental acts that constitute objects. To constitute an object means to disclose or present an object in a certain way, that is, as the phenomena are “manifest” to our awareness. The term noema denotes the object in its givenness. It is the intended object as it is presented or given to us in experience.¹⁶⁹

To phenomenologically analyse the mind properly means to take both the objective and subjective correlate of mental acts into account. Thus the intentional nature of mental acts must be understood in such a way that the relata are considered to be inseparable. An intentional act, then, cannot be properly analysed without also considering its objective correlate, the intentional object – and vice versa.¹⁷⁰ Brentano referred to this dual (but inseparable) relation between an experience and its object as the “dyadic relation”.¹⁷¹ When we take this dyadic relation seriously, we appreciate that to clarify the nature of intentionality means to clarify the relation between mind (subject) and world. From a phenomenological perspective the mind is not isolated and separate from the world (I will discuss this idea in more detail below).

It is important to be clear about what we mean by “world”. I agree that, phenomenologically speaking, the world must be understood as that which presents itself to us as the “othered”. It is that which transcends the subject and is experientially conceived as the exteriorised context towards which consciousness is directed and intentionally related.

Thompson offers following definition of “world”:

¹⁶⁸ John J. Dummond, “The Structure of Intentionality,” in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 71-75.

¹⁶⁹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 24-25.

¹⁷⁰ Gallagher and Zahavi discuss this issue of syntax in Sartre’s work in greater detail. See Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 113.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 113.

From a phenomenological standpoint, world has to do with the idea of transcendence, that is, of something that exceeds our ability to encompass it, and it is like an ever receding horizon; it is always open to further disclosure.¹⁷²

This means that the intentionality of consciousness is a special relation that holds between the subjectivity of consciousness and the “othered” (object). This relation holds whether or not the object “exists” (in the common sense). Husserl comments on this. He says:

If I represent God to myself, or an angel, or an intelligible thing-in-itself, or a physical thing or a round square etc., I mean the transcendent object named in each case, in other words my intentional object: it makes no difference whether this object exists or is imaginary or absurd.¹⁷³

What Husserl is saying is that consciousness can be directed towards “unreal” objects with an analogous structure as sense perception.¹⁷⁴ That which consciousness intends is the world of the subject, and it is this ability of the mind to concern itself with objects, which may or may not “exist”, that allows the transcendent (the world) to manifest and present itself to the subject through first-personal experience.

2.1.2 *The Self-transcendence of Subjectivity*

A further point upon which I agree with the phenomenological tradition is this: When we discuss the nature of intentionality, it is important to distinguish between two kinds of intentionality, narrow and broad.¹⁷⁵

Narrow intentionality refers to the vectorial capacity of consciousness, its object-directedness. Experiences that are object-directed are those experiences in which we are typically conscious *of* something. Whatever mental act is involved, it is always about something – the object (which need not exist). The etymology of “object” also indicates this; it

¹⁷² Evan Thompson, Dan Zahavi, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and John Dunne, “The Reflective Self: Questions and Answers, Part II (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2369129033678559744&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010), min.: 16.20.

¹⁷³ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations I-II*, trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2001), 127.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁷⁵ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 22.

means “something that stands before us”.¹⁷⁶ Experiences that have a narrow intentionality are thus experiences of something as distinct from our sense of a present subject. A few examples of this kind of experience is thinking of *something*; remembering *something*; imagining *something*; wishing for *something* etc.

Object-directed experiences are a “transitive” kind of consciousness, because the function of consciousness to intend an object has a subject-object structure.¹⁷⁷ The subject-object structure is granted by virtue of the transcendence of that which cannot be encompassed by the subject – the exterior world of experience. Thus intentionality is characterised by difference and distinction in contrast to self-awareness, which is characterised by some form of identity.¹⁷⁸

The subject-object structure of intentionality entails that the intentional relation is “aspectual”. For intentional directedness (i.e., “object-directed intentionality”) to be aspectual means that the subject-object structure, which implies that the subject has vectorial access to his world, is necessarily perspectival.¹⁷⁹ This perspectival quality is known to us via the indexical “I” which is the locus of our experience. It is a first-personal self-reference that is non-objectifying and acquaints us with ourselves without object-discrimination.¹⁸⁰ As Zahavi points out, “‘I’ is not only a condition of possibility, but is in an important sense the anchoring point of the person’s entire system of reference.”¹⁸¹ We might also wish to say that object-consciousness presupposes that there is a subject confronted with experience, and that this sense of “here” and “I” is necessary for objects to be encountered as such. In this way, indexical reference determines a subjective point of view on the world that has its own perspectival mode of presentation. From this follows that intentional directedness (e.g.,

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 15.

¹⁷⁹ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 114.

¹⁸⁰ Dan Zahavi, “First-Personal Self-reference and the Self-as-subject,” *Consciousness and Cognition* 16 (2007): 602.

¹⁸¹ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 24.

perception) is by nature an indexical kind of experience.¹⁸² Thus the *aspectual givenness* of our first-person point of view is necessary for us to experientially access the “other” (the world).¹⁸³

Broad intentionality is not defined in terms of the object-directedness of narrow intentionality. Rather, it is defined as a kind of “openness to the world”¹⁸⁴. It involves the world in a way that allows the subject to be affected by it, although the subject might not “thematically”¹⁸⁵ attend to his world.¹⁸⁶ I also agree with phenomenological philosophy on this very important point that there is a significant range of experiences which cannot be defined in terms of object-directed (narrow) intentionality.

Intentionally broad experiences might also be thematic, but not object-directed. Examples are everyday experiences which have no salient subject-object structure. Such experiences do not have intentional objects; they are not “about” distinct phenomena in the subject’s world. They are not directed toward objects that transcend the subject, as things that stand over and against himself as a distinct subject. To these kinds of experience belong

¹⁸² Ibid., 24-25

¹⁸³ We might want to entertain the idea that the bounds of the subjective, indexical “I” determines what stands outside of this identity. The formation of the subject in this way defines what is “other” and thus gives rise to the (life-) world of the experiencing subject. To take this thought even further, we might wish to say that the configuration of the subject is also the origin of intentionality and cognition (if cognition is identified as adaptive interaction with the environment). I explored these ideas in Chapter 2, where I examined the biological foundations for the “phenomenological domain”, which is the dimension/continuum in which any object manifests itself, whether it is internal or external. See Dan Zahavi, “Internalism, Externalism, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Synthese* 160 (2008): 374.

¹⁸⁴ We can also appreciate the concept of broad intentionality when we consider it within the context of Husserl’s distinctions between activity and passivity, as well as receptivity and affectivity. According to Husserl, whenever a subject is active, it must also be passive, because the ability to act is a kind of *reacting* to something. Thus, when we actively take a position, we have already been passively affected. Husserl further distinguishes receptivity from affectivity, because our intentional activity attends or reacts to whatever is passively affecting us. Even the reactive notion that “I notice” can only occur because of preceeding affection. Husserl thus points out that what we have actively thematised has been passively and nonthematically affecting us. In this way, our embeddedness in the world affects us through the ability of our subjectivity to remain open to the world in an intransitive and nonthematic fashion.

¹⁸⁵ “Thematic” in this context means that whatever is being spoken about is the theme of a subject’s conscious experience; it is the “thematised” focus of our experience, meaning that it is at the foreground of experience and consciously attended to. By contrast, the phenomenological world is most of the time at the background of a subject’s experience, as the unthematic but implicit context of his conscious life. See Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 22.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 316.

moods, feelings of pain, nausea, objectless anxiety, depression, boredom, and skillful activity.¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, phenomenologists insist that we include such non-object-directed experiences within the concept of intentionality, because they wish to emphasise that even in these kinds of instances, consciousness remains open to what is other: it is not self-enclosed. Rather, consciousness discloses our embeddedness in the world (our embeddedness is revealed by how our interior subjectivity is framed and affected by our world).¹⁸⁸ Let us then review some examples of broad intentionality.

Consider a mood; for example, the case of depression. It does not vectorially access the world in the same way as other directed emotions do (e.g., the feeling of sympathy for another human being). But it does reveal how we are embedded in our world, because it has a world-involving nature – it colours how things are presented to us, and in this way influences the way we receive the world and react to it.

A different example of an intentionally broad experience is Sartre's famous case of feeling eyestrain.¹⁸⁹ Imagine you read late into the night until you eventually feel fatigued. You notice this first when your eyes begin to tremble, followed by a blurriness of the words on the page in front of you. This feeling first manifests intransitively. It has no intended object. But your bodily feelings are not self-enclosed or without openness to the world because your immediate environment discloses itself in a very specific way through this feeling – just like moods and depression. Therefore, bodily feelings have a world-involving character. We might also wish to say that in such instances consciousness is not self-contained.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 2; and Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 116.

¹⁸⁸ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 22.

¹⁸⁹ J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 332-333.

The world-involving character of intentionality compelled Merleau-Ponty to believe that subjectivity is not and can never be a self-enclosed mental realm, but that it is necessarily co-dependent with and inseparable from world.¹⁹⁰ Subjectivity orientates itself to that which it is not. In this way, as Zahavi puts it, subjectivity has “openness toward alterity, a movement of exteriorization and perpetual self-transcendence”.¹⁹¹ This interplay between activity and passivity describes how an ongoing “operative intentionality”¹⁹² (broad) underlies object-directed intentional experience (narrow). We can illustrate this discussion on subjectivity and intentionality thus:

To review the discussion so far: According to phenomenologists, intentionality is one central feature of consciousness. By considering the structure of intentionality, we understand the structure of our experience. To this end, I discussed the “correlational structure” of intentionality, which comprises the intentional act (noesis) and the intentional object (noema). In the eyes of continental phenomenologists, there are different types of experience, namely those that have an intentionally narrow (subject-object) structure and those that have an intentionally broad (no subject-object) structure. Experiences that are intentionally broad remain open to the world, leaving subjectivity with an ongoing operative intentionality that

¹⁹⁰ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 430.

¹⁹¹ Dan Zahavi, “Intentionality and Phenomenality: A Phenomenological Take on the Hard Problem,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, Research Library (2003): 73-74.

¹⁹² M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), xviii.

connects it with the “life-world” of the subject.

From the viewpoint of intentionality, then, subjectivity is never self-enclosed – but what about self-awareness, the other important feature of consciousness? Does this analysis hold true in the case of self-awareness (time-consciousness) as well? I turn to this question in the next section of this chapter.

2.1.3 *The Relationship between Self-awareness and Intentional Experience*

In this section I will clarify how phenomenologists think about the relationship between self-awareness and intentionality. In order to do so, I will draw on my prior treatment of self-awareness and inner time-consciousness in Chapter 1. This will help us come to a greater appreciation of how self-awareness, time-consciousness, and intentionality inter-relate. It will also clarify the position of Thompson and Zahavi on the openness of subjectivity in such a way that my disagreement with them will become more salient. In this way, I will show just how important the openness of subjectivity is for these phenomenologists. However, I strongly disagree with their thesis.

According to Thompson and Zahavi, self-awareness and inner time-consciousness (pre-reflective self-awareness) can never appear on their own – without intentional experiences.¹⁹³ Zahavi tells us that we should not understand the relation between the absolute flow (inner time-consciousness) and intentional acts as a relation between two utterly distinct domains of subjectivity.¹⁹⁴ Intentional experiences (acts) are not given to us by some other part of subjectivity, but through *inner* consciousness, which belongs intrinsically to the very structure of the intentional acts themselves. Therefore, inner consciousness cannot independently exist from intentional experience.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by H. E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), liii.

¹⁹⁴ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 71.

¹⁹⁵ Dan Zahavi (in discussion with his colleagues Evan Thompson, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and John Dunne), “The Reflective Self: Questions and Answers, Part I (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008).” <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2369129033678559744&hl=en&emb=1#docid=6084386910063768436> (accessed July 31, 2010).

Thompson also argues that pre-reflective self-awareness streams (being structurally one and the same thing as inner time-consciousness), and that this streaming is due to the inflow of impressions from intentional acts,¹⁹⁶ acts which are, according to Zahavi, also characterised by *inner* consciousness (they are inherently self-aware).¹⁹⁷ Thus inner time-consciousness, or the temporal flow of self-awareness, cannot subsist coherently over time without the threefold structure of impression (the inflow of intentional acts)-retention-protention, which is an invariant component of consciousness. Thompson says:

Prereflective self-awareness is streaming because it is constitutive of the streaming of flowing experiences themselves, not a pure and empty awareness that appears on its own. By the same token, it is standing because it is an ever-present and unchanging feature of consciousness.¹⁹⁸

From Thompson words we can extract the understanding that absolute consciousness is always present in conscious experience, and necessarily so; however, it is itself not operative without intentional acts and the continual inflow thereof as primal impressions, which are retained and anticipated by our consciousness.

Zahavi holds the same view: While we can identify the standing-streaming (the absolute flow), this should not be understood as something that exists apart or independent from intentional experiences. He says:

It is highly appropriate to distinguish the strict singularity of the *lebendige Gegenwart* from the plurality of changing experiences. But, of course, this should not be misunderstood. Distinguishability is not the same as separability. We are not dealing with a pure or empty field of self-manifestation upon which the concrete experiences subsequently make their entry. The absolute flow has no self-manifestation of its own, but is the very self-manifestation of the experiences (emphasis mine).¹⁹⁹

What Zahavi wishes to underline is that the self-givenness of the flow, our experience of the standing-streaming, is the pre-reflective self-manifestation of intentional experiences (acts),

¹⁹⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 328.

¹⁹⁷ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 71-72.

¹⁹⁸ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 328.

¹⁹⁹ Dan Zahavi, "Inner Time-consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness," in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 170.

and any analysis of inner time-consciousness or pre-reflective self-awareness is therefore not an analysis of any additional awareness that stands over and above our mental acts. The correlational structure of intentional experiences comprises the object and the intentional act, which are intrinsically given to us in the first-person perspective. They are self-aware.²⁰⁰

Zahavi believes that the very infrastructure of consciousness is temporality. Not only is consciousness inherently temporal, but it is only through it being temporal that it can be pre-reflectively aware of itself.²⁰¹ This is so because there can be no inner time-consciousness (or pre-reflective self-awareness) without temporal content. Zahavi says: “Time-consciousness never appears in pure form, but always as a pervasive *sensibility*, as the very sensing of the sensations.”²⁰² Thus the “enduring tone” of our experience only occurs as a conjoint phenomenon that includes our subjectivity and the world: it is the streaming flow of impression, retention, and protention *of* temporal content.

Consciousness in this sense is necessarily intentional (relational) and open towards alterity. This entails a movement to exteriorisation and a tendency to self-transcendence. For consciousness to be perpetually self-transcending means that it continually turns to that which exceeds its own boundaries, or to that which denotes its external environment. In this way, consciousness has an exteriorised outlook. Pre-reflective awareness is thus neither irrelational nor self-sufficient. Intentionality and self-awareness can never be exclusive alternatives: self-awareness should not be understood as a dimension of subjectivity that can be so preoccupied with self that it excludes the external world, or, to use Zahavi’s own words, “impedes the contact with transcendent being.”²⁰³ To the contrary, subjectivity is actually open towards that which it is not, and it is only in this encounter with the Other that subjectivity can reveal

²⁰⁰ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 74-75; and Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 54.

²⁰¹ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 82.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 124.

itself to itself. What is phenomenally disclosed in our experience, then, is not a subjectivity that is entirely self-enclosed, but openness towards alterity and self-transcendence.²⁰⁴

In Zahavi's view, self-manifestation (self-awareness) and hetero-manifestation (disclosure of the world and the Other) are inseparable. This in turn means that we cannot attend to our subjectivity and the Other at the same time. We cannot simultaneously be directed toward the outside and the inside. According to Zahavi, it is a fundamental principle of consciousness that subjectivity cannot withdraw from its relation to the Other:

Even if consciousness could turn its attention so completely toward itself that everything else were excluded, it would not escape the confrontation with Otherness.²⁰⁵

In Zahavi's eyes, then, the subjectivity of consciousness is never self-enclosed, but open to otherness and to that which its interiority cannot encompass. In this sense, self-awareness goes hand in hand with narrow and broad intentionality. If our intentional experiences are not object-directed, then they are at least open to the world and affected by it.

From the viewpoint of traditional, continental phenomenology, then, the self-awareness of consciousness is never self-sufficient and self-enclosed.²⁰⁶ "Self-awareness and self-identity are incompatible determinations", because self-awareness always presupposes a minimal fissure (a self-othering) that gives rise to duality.²⁰⁷ This polarisation of reality in turn is the birth of the "ego-self".²⁰⁸ This self (or self-awareness) needs intentionality and the confrontation with something different from itself in order to be self-aware. If intentionality were not present, then Zahavi believes that self-awareness (and the self for this matter) would dissipate as pure nothingness.²⁰⁹ To avoid this, the self-awareness of subjectivity must depend

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 124, 137.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 125.

²⁰⁶ J.-P Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by H. E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), liii.

²⁰⁷ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 130.

²⁰⁸ I will discuss the subject of self and identity in my final chapter (7). See also Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 130.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 128.

against its relation to that which transcends the bounds of its identity.²¹⁰

I disagree with Thompson's and Zahavi's view that subjectivity is never self-sufficient and self-enlosed. This is our point of disagreement despite a lot of consensus about the nature of consciousness. I will argue against this claim by pointing out that continental phenomenology does not have the practical expertise in first-person methods to substantiate its claims about the fundamental structure of self-awareness. To this end, I will argue that we can in fact have "cognitive access" to a type of experience that they have denied us on the basis of philosophical reflection. My next three chapters are devoted to this. Chapter 3, 4, and 5 will discuss first-person methods and the idea of "cognitive access". Chapter 6 will then introduce in greater detail the type of experience that challenges continental phenomenology and Thompson's attempt to account for continuity between life and mind.

In the next sections, I will first outline the types of experience that belong to the plateau of consensus. I will then add to this list the type of experience that I wish to consider in the chapters that follow.

2.1.4 Modes of Intentionality and Types of Experience

The consensus is that there are perceptual kinds of experience, and that these kinds of experience can be further subdivided into endogenous and exogenous types of perceptual experience. What is not agreed upon is whether there are non-perceptual kinds of experience. This is the type of experience I wish to consider as a case of phenomenological counter-evidence to the thesis that subjectivity must always be open towards alterity.

I begin by observing that there are subject-object structured experiences and subject/aspect structured experiences. Next, I will introduce perceptual types of experience and the difference between exogenous and endogenous ones. Following this, I will leave the

²¹⁰ Ibid., 129. I will discuss this subject further in Chapter 6, where I consider what contemplative phenomenologists have to say about the self, self-awareness, and the relation these notions have to identity and phenomenal awareness. I will show that contemplative phenomenology deeply challenges claims made by traditional, continental phenomenologists.

plateau of consensus and add to the list a non-perceptual type of experience. Finally, I will clarify what relationship the types of experience have to the modes of intentionality (narrow and broad), and thereby distinguish heteronomous from autonomous experiences. This will help to outline my precise disagreement with continental phenomenologists.

My first observation, which I make with the help of Yandell's brief pointers in the matter,²¹¹ is that we can distinguish between two kinds of experience that present themselves to us: some of them have a subject-object structure whereas others have a subject/aspect structure.

Experiences with a subject-object structure appear to the subject as presentations of something that is clearly distinct from the subject himself, but there are also experiences that do not display such a structure; they do not seem to the subject as presenting anything that might exist apart from him. Rather, such experiences seem to be conscious states in which the subject "discovers" or "discerns" some *aspect of himself* (whatever this may or may not contain). A subjective experiential condition is "encountered" by or "disclosed" to the subject either in an objectified manner (via a process of self-othering) or *in and through the lived subjective condition itself*.

These initial considerations already indicate that phenomenology needs to distinguish between (three) types of experience: the exogenous-perceptual type; the endogenous-perceptual type, and the (non-orthodox) non-perceptual type.²¹² Continental phenomenology

²¹¹ Keith E. Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 19.

²¹² These distinctions I make have been inspired by Yandell's own discussion of "perceptual" and "introspective" experiences. See Keith E. Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 42-43. However, I have decided to use different terms than Yandell for three reasons: (1) as my discussion proceeds, I will show that the notion of "introspection" is not only highly problematic but also limiting and ill-applied. (2) Introspective experiences in the phenomenological tradition are still of a subject-object structure and are therefore also referred to as being "perceptual" in nature because they share the same transitive structure. (3) The notion "introspection" fails to communicate a crucial distinction between reflective and non-reflective forms of lived-through subjectivity in which the relationship between intransitive, non-reflective, and non-thematic self-awareness and intentional (directionally orientated) conscious acts play an important role in our understanding of human consciousness and their cognitive status; this also includes the very enabling condition of human subjectivity. (4) My own approach allows me to make more phenomenologically refined distinctions relevant for latter discussion.

accepts perceptual types of experience, but not non-perceptual types.

An exogenous-perceptual experience is one in which a subject seems to be aware of something that exists independent of him. It is oriented towards an object relative to the subject. This kind of experience could also be described as a kind of “outer perception”. It would be veridical if and only if it would were an accurate (where accuracy is truth) conscious event that *actually* grants acquaintance to realities and states of affairs that *do in fact exist* external to the subject (e.g. the world). Therefore, the conscious event has truth-value by virtue of being an accurate and authentic instance in which realities or states of affairs are disclosed to the subject.²¹³

In contrast, an endogenous-perceptual experience is one in which a subject seems to be aware of something that is internal to him (possibly an aspect). It pertains to the subject himself (although via an “objectifying activity”²¹⁴). To capture this kind of experience we might wish to draw from Husserl’s own terms, such as “inner perception”²¹⁵ or “immanent

²¹³ Let me illustrate this point by discussing the case of ordinary experience in which we have at least sometimes intuitions about whether those experiences are accurate (“veridical”) or inaccurate (“falsidical”). It is reasonable to say that we are capable of assessing such experiences for accuracy, with more or less reliability. The question of accuracy (i.e., that a conscious event may or may not be veridical) in respect to ordinary experiences is motivated by the possibility that one can be misled by them. It is undeniable that there are ordinary cases in which one is misled by one’s senses, and it is plausible to say that in such cases things are not as they *appear* to be.

Ordinary experiences, then, are often divided into three broad categories: veridical perceptions, illusions, and hallucinations. I hold that mystical states of consciousness can, and should be, treated analogously. We can thus divide the field into veridical mystical experiences, illusions, and hallucinations. Here some examples of the categories of ordinary experience: when one has a visual experience of a golden object, it may be that one is really seeing an object and its golden “colour” (veridical perception), that one is seeing a black object (illusion), or that one is not seeing an object at all (hallucination). In the case of mystical experience, for example, when one has the conscious event of the “Presence of God”, it may be that one is really aware of the “Presence” and its beatific quality (veridical mystical experience), that one is aware of a fiendish “Presence” (illusion), or that one is not aware of the “Presence” at all (hallucination). It is therefore important for an adequate understanding of MSCs to be able to practice discernment in these matters.

For further discussion on the issues surrounding the veridicality of perception see Tim Crane, “The Problem of Perception,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-problem/> (Accessed 6 October 2009), Matthew Soteriou, “The Disjunctive Theory of Perception,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-disjunctive/> (Accessed 6 October 2009) and Susanna Siegel, “The Contents of Perception,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-contents/> (Accessed 6 October 2009).

²¹⁴ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 51.

²¹⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana. Vol. 8, Erste Philosophie II (1923-24)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), 471; 10, 126.

perception”²¹⁶. Yandell also discusses this kind of inner perceptual experience; he says: “Experiences all have subjects, though not all have [external] objects.”²¹⁷ This is so because some experiences do not typically require objects for their lived-through quality to obtain. These kinds of experience, again, may or may not be veridical just like exogenous-perceptual experiences, because they might correctly present something to the subject’s awareness, or they might do so misleadingly.

Now I wish to consider the non-perceptual type of experience. It differs markedly from the other two kinds of perceptual experiences, because exogenous- and endogenous-perceptual experiences maintain a distinction in their phenomenological structure between subject and object, but a non-perceptual kind of experience collapses this completely.

Continental phenomenology does not accept this type of experience. Nevertheless, I contend that such experiences are possible and that they involve a higher level of immediate acquaintance than we have of our own mental life (if we understand our mental life to constitute “transcendent”²¹⁸ objects). This is so because bringing the content of our own conscious states thematically to our own awareness normally requires of us to direct the gaze of our consciousness at the intended object/content by objectifying it (“othering” it). Therefore, such conscious acts give rise to a perceiving subject and a “transcendental object”²¹⁹ – an object which stands outside of the self-enclosed pure subjectivity of the subject such that it escapes and transcends its closure.

Objectifying conscious acts distance the object cognised (or, in phenomenological

²¹⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana. Vol. 8, Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 11, 320.

²¹⁷ Keith E. Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 42.

²¹⁸ The term “transcendent” is used here to distance the objects from the subject. The objects are perceived as external from the subject’s identity and boundaries. In this way, mental objects and “physical” objects have in common that they are detected at a distance from the subject’s indivisible interiority. I will argue that non-perceptual types of experiences do not distance that which is phenomenally disclosed: they are hence a more immediate form of acquaintance. See also fns. 46 and 164.

²¹⁹ The term “transcendental” is used here in a phenomenological sense that emphasises how subjectivity goes beyond itself and is open to the Other. This is the anti-thesis to subjectivity self-enclosed. See also fns. 46, 164, and 218.

terms, the object “intended”) from the cognizing subject. Locke referred to this in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as “reflection”.²²⁰ Reflection is our ability to turn our attention inward upon ourselves in order to make our internal mental operations contained in our minds the very objects of our attention. This capacity to reverse our attention towards our internal mental life is now referred to in phenomenology as the “reflection model” or “reflection theory” of the mind.²²¹

Non-perceptual experiences are different, because they do *not* give rise to a dualistic structure. Instead of creating a gulf between subject and object via an objectifying activity, non-perceptual experiences break down this duality and replace it with a non-dual state of immediate epistemic acquaintance. In this non-dual state there exists neither a sense of one’s own subjective consciousness nor a sense of an independent, external object, which transcends the closure of the non-dual state.²²²

Such lived-through conscious experiences have also caught the attention of some analytic philosophers who have decided to enter epistemological discussions of contemplative states of consciousness. A very good example of this is when the analytic philosopher Alston considered such a non-perceptual and non-dual experience, which he identified as an extreme type of experience. He explains:

[This] extreme [type of] experience in which all distinctions are transcended in an undifferentiated unity is properly thought of as absolute immediacy. If no distinctions can be made within the seamless unity, then there is no possibility of distinguishing the experience involved from the object of awareness. Indeed, the immediacy here is more absolute than in one’s awareness of one’s own conscious state. There we at least have the

²²⁰ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 107; 127.

²²¹ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 15.

²²² B. Allan Wallace, *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Towards A New Science of Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 118-119. It is important to note that the recognition of non-perceptual types of experience in the philosophy of mysticism is heavily indebted to the work on the phenomenon of pure consciousness by the “distinguished scholar” Robert Forman (as Wallace himself says, p. 118). See Robert K. C. Forman, ed., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness* (State University of New York Press, 1999); and ed., *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

distinction between subject and object, but even that drops out in the kind of ...experience reported.²²³

Alston's observation astutely recognises that endogenous-perceptual experiences are like exogenous-perceptual ones. Perceptual kinds of experience have in common that our awareness of our own mental life is dualistically and transitively structured, which is unlike the non-dual and intransitive structure of non-perceptual experiences.

Thus whenever I speak of a subject *having an experience*, I mean to include exogenous (outer) and endogenous (inner) lived-through perceptual events as well as lived-through non-perceptual (non-dual) conscious states. My approach thus contrasts with that of continental phenomenologists, who limit the concept of "experience" to perceptual (intentional) types of experience. Therefore, from my point of view, an "experience" denotes a conscious state in which (1) a subject *seems* to be aware of an object external to him; or (2) a subject *seems* to be aware of an aspect of himself in an objectified manner; or (3) *a subject seems to consciously live through a non-perceptual state that immediately acquaints him with realities and states of affairs (in an intransitive but thematic fashion) that do not transcend the subjective, self-enclosed condition of the non-dually lived-through conscious state.*²²⁴

To sum up, I have distinguished between two kinds of experience that present themselves to us: subject-object (transitive) structured experiences and subject/aspect (transitive or intransitive) structured experiences. I also distinguished between perceptual (exogenous and endogenous) and non-perceptual types of experience. How, then, do the different modes of intentionality (operative/broad and object-directed/narrow) relate to these distinctions?

First, I classified subject-object structured experiences as exogenous-perceptual kinds.

²²³ William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 23-24.

²²⁴ This does not entail, however, that the realities encountered cannot transcend the "subject" or "self" as part of the dualistic phenomenology of subject-object structured perceptual experiences. The precise metaphysical nature of the subjectivity in question here remains an unaddressed question at this stage of our inquiry just as our phenomenologically driven initial approach to the subject exacts.

They function with the help of a narrow (object-directed) intentionality. The objects thereof may or may not “exist” in the common sense use of the term. Perceptual experiences are defined by the clear vectorial nature of the subject-to-object relation in which phenomena appear to the subject as distinct from his own subjectivity. They transcend the subject because we have two clear distinctive relata involved: the subject and the world towards which subjectivity is directed. Such experiences have a dualistic structure. Therefore, our subjectivity in perceptual kinds of experience is open and perpetually moves towards self-transcendence.

Second, this class of exogenous-perceptual experiences also includes experiences defined by a broad intentionality, despite their lack of a clear-cut subject-object structure (the fact that they are intransitive). There are two reasons for this: (1) Broad intentionality still functions as a kind of operative openness to the world, because it is affected (if not at times defined) by it. Thus broad intentionality has a cognitive relation with its environment, which is a minimal sense of perception. (2) The experiences are not about the subject solely or independent of the “world”. Hence the nature of broad intentionality is that of subjectivity not self-enclosed. I will discuss each of these reasons briefly in turn.

(1) Thompson defines cognition as “the behaviour or conduct of a system in relation to its environment”.²²⁵ He uses this definition in the context of biologically (self-organised) living systems. In this context, cognition has two levels: the first allows the system to assimilate compounds from the environment for purposes of ordinary functioning (e.g. metabolic assimilation); the second enables the living system to draw on novel elements of the environment to effect change in its own structure.²²⁶ Broad intentionality is cognitive in this (analogous) sense. The minimal perception is about the condition of the subject (e.g. a mood or bodily feeling), which is a result of its relation to his (transcendent) world. In this

²²⁵ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 124.

²²⁶ Ibid., 125.

minimal sense a perceptual relation exists that also has two levels: first, the subjective condition of the person can non-thematically draw on the background context of his world for everyday functioning (e.g. absorbed skillful activity); and second, his subjectivity can be affected by the external environment such that it effects change in this lived-through experience. All this can be operative with the help of broad intentionality.

(2) This in turn supports the second reason that “broadly intentional” experiences are exogenous and perceptual, because experiences in which broad intentionality is operative are not self-enclosed, and they may not be about the subject himself considered independently of the world. The subject remains open to and influenced by his embeddedness in the world, and his experience, although not “about” anything in particular, may be due to external conditions or “about” his relationship with the world. Therefore, experiences with both narrow and broad intentionality are heteronomous, that is, other-determined.

Third, when we think about how different modes of intentionality relate to different types of experience, we must also consider endogenous-perceptual types of experience. These types of experience also have a dualistic structure because subjects are aware of something that is internal to them, but via an objectifying activity (a process of “self-othering”). This introduces the notion of an “inner” or “immanent” perception as well as a dualistic structure. Hence endogenous-perceptual types of experience operate with a broad intentionality.

Fourth, I considered experiences resembling a subject/aspect structure, which are completely self-determined and independent of a transcendent world or any exteriorisation, including distinct objects of any kind; they are completely devoid of intentional structure, both narrow and broad. These non-perceptual kinds of experience are self-enclosed such that the subjective experiential condition is “encountered” by, or “disclosed” to, the subject *in and through the lived subjective condition itself*. Such experiences have a non-dualistic structure, and are therefore autonomous.

I disagree with continental phenomenology on the question of whether or not the fourth category of autonomous experience exists (and whether we can have “cognitive access” to such experiences). The default position of phenomenologists is that there are only heteronomous experiences (of the perceptual type: intentionally narrow and broad; endogenous and exogenous). In the remainder of this thesis, I will to argue that from a phenomenological point of view, we must acknowledge the available phenomenological evidence that autonomous experiences are *prima facie* possible; and that this fact warrants the attention of both continental phenomenology and Thompson’s neurophenomenological.

To this end, in chapters 3 and 4, I will discuss first-person methods. In Chapter 5, I will introduce the idea of “cognitive access”. I will argue that we do have cognitive access to non-perceptual types of experience. Finally, in Chapter 6, I will introduce this type of experience in greater detail, and consider its consequences for continental phenomenology and Thompson’s *continuity thesis*.

Chapter 3

To Observe the Phenomena: A Synthesis of Phenomenological and Contemplative Methods

When Hindu and Buddhist Philosophers reflected on states of consciousness achieved in a variety of meditative states, they were practicing phenomenology.²²⁷

David Woodruff Smith

In this chapter, I intend to introduce the basic logic of first-person methods for the investigation of consciousness (both continental and contemplative) in order to show: (i) that in methodological matters, as continental phenomenology holds, first-person methods give us adequate “cognitive access” to all experiences that fall under the intentional principle of consciousness (perceptual types of experience); and (ii) that we also have the relevant cognitive access to experiences which fall under the self-aware principle of consciousness (non-perceptual types of experience), continental phenomenologists to the contrary. I believe that this fact allows us to examine both the objective and subjective domain (principle) of consciousness. Phenomenologists accept the former possibility, but not the latter.

I believe that continental phenomenologists do not accept this because they emphasise philosophical analysis over practical expertise when they investigate consciousness first-personally. Contemplative phenomenologists, in contrast, focus on the practical component of the phenomenological method and develop this to a high level of excellence. In this chapter, I will discuss in greater detail this decisive difference between continental and contemplative phenomenology, because the contemplative method is a platform that (i) enables us to extend the domain of “observable experiences” and (ii) clears the way for non-perceptual types of experience.

²²⁷ David Woodruff Smith, “Phenomenology,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/> (Accessed February 8 2010).

I will start this chapter by pointing out the importance of first-person methods in the study of consciousness, and the role they play in neurophenomenology.

Next, I will introduce the phenomenological and contemplative method respectively. I will point out that (i) neurophenomenology is turning to the contemplative method to aid a component of the phenomenological method that has not received adequate attention, namely the pragmatic approach to experience itself; (ii) both the phenomenological method and the contemplative method share a logic; (iii) professionally trained subjects in contemplative methods have at their disposal cognitive faculties that are more precise and more reliable – attention is thus a trainable skill – which is a fact that (iv) makes contemplative phenomenologists most suitable to examine non-perceptual types of experience.

I will follow this up with two closely related chapters. Chapter 4 will consider scepticism about first-person methods, and outline nine objections to the possibility that first-person methods are a suitable approach to studying the intentional (objective pole) and self-aware (subjective pole) domain of consciousness. The first seven objections focus on the intentional domain of consciousness, and objections eight and nine focus on the self-aware domain of consciousness. In Chapter 4, I will respond to the first seven. Then, in Chapter 5, I will respond to objection eight, advancing a “Theory of Disclosing” as an account of cognitive access, and thereby expanding the concept of “observable experiences” to include non-perceptual types of experience. These two chapters will set the stage for Chapter 6, where I will respond to objection nine.

3.1 Phenomenological and Contemplative Methods in Perspective

A complete science of mind must be built on the foundations of a theory that can account for subjectivity and consciousness.²²⁸ In the contemporary climate of the mind sciences this is a truism. To do this, we need to include lived experience in our theoretic and scientific study of

²²⁸ Ibid., 3.

consciousness. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch are correct to point out that to ignore this, or to even deny the truth of our own experience, renders our theoretic and scientific study of ourselves without a subject matter.²²⁹ Thus it is important to put the phenomenological and the contemplative method, both of which are concerned with the reality of conscious experience itself, into comparative perspective.

There are good reasons to include lived experience into the study of consciousness: (1) no “scientific” third-person data is possible without it; and (2) first-person phenomenological data put constraints on our theoretical and methodological work.

The second point is very important, because in my final Chapter I will put forward available *prima facie* phenomenological evidence for the existence of non-perceptual types of experience. Since neurophenomenology is committed to phenomenology as a partner in the scientific study of consciousness, and because this commitment puts constraints on our theoretical and methodological work, neurophenomenology must take seriously the data we have available. I will show that Thompson and other collaborative researchers in fact show concern about this, and for good reason.

Let us consider the first reason to include lived experience into the study of consciousness. When we wish to investigate consciousness, our third-person data is actually meant to be about the subject’s first-personally lived-through experience, and the information we get from the technology of the brain sciences is meaningless if not correlated with the subject’s subjective reality. We only value observations of functional processes that happen in the brain because we suppose that they correlate with subjective lived-through realities determined on other, experiential, and first-personal grounds.²³⁰ The experiential dimension thus contributes meaning without which we would merely describe biological activity, and by

²²⁹ Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 13.

²³⁰ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 16.

itself this would not inform us in ways we would need it to for our explanatory concerns. Therefore, the meaning of third-person data is dependent on us first having access to first-person data.

This brings us to my second reason to phenomenologically guide our scientific endeavours. Phenomenological accounts direct and constrain our theoretical and methodological efforts. We need to first have a clear understanding of what we wish to explain – the explanandum – before we consider explanatory proposals. Until we clearly demarcate the “terrain of the explanandum”²³¹ no explanation can make any sense. It is obvious, actually, that researchers rely heavily on subjects’ “introspective” reports as well as their own first-person experience.²³²

The research program called neurophenomenology recognises that first-person data is indispensable and demonstrates how this insight can be used to our advantage. Neurophenomenology stresses the importance of accessing accurate first-person data from phenomenologically trained subjects in order to qualify and quantify the biological processes relevant for consciousness. The first-person data that becomes available in turn helps to uncover novel third-person data that was disqualified as “noise” beforehand.²³³ Hence detailed phenomenological accounts, integrated into experimental protocols of cognitive, neuroscientific research, inform our investigations into consciousness.

Neurophenomenology also holds that precise phenomenological data extracted from first-person methods “provide strong constraints on the analysis and interpretation of the physiological processes relevant to consciousness”²³⁴. This also holds true for contemplative

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 311.

²³³ Antoine Lutz and Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology: Integrating Subjective Experience and Brain Dynamics in the Neuroscience of Consciousness,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10:9-10 (2003): 32.

²³⁴ Ibid., 33.

knowledge.²³⁵ Thus theories that outright deny the truth of our own experience, including that of contemplative practitioners (for example, continental phenomenology), have the onus of providing powerful arguments in their favour, and making salient the falsehood of the intuitions involved. This means that they have to offer cogent error theories, which excludes aporetic, ad hoc auxiliary hypotheses and the outright denial of our otherwise reasonably held default stance.

If first-personal data is so important, how then do we go about examining lived-through experience in a rigorous first-person manner? To answer this question, I will now consider the basic logic of two developed and disciplined first-person approaches employed in philosophical phenomenology and contemplative phenomenology to investigate consciousness.²³⁶ I will begin with the continental, phenomenological method and then turn to the contemplative method.

3.1.1 *The Phenomenological Method*

Like ordinary scientific thought, the phenomenological method wishes to avoid subjective bias. To accomplish this it approaches its domain in a controlled and objective manner. It is objective in the sense that it offers an account of subjective experience rather than a subjective account of experience, which are not one and the same thing. Frequently, thinkers are confused about this point, because they believe that they can get a grip on subjective experience by turning it into some object that can be investigated via third-person methods. But being objective in the scientific sense is not limited to third-person approaches; rather, it is about avoiding prejudice and cultivating disinterestedness. To accomplish this, science employs methodological steps to control its practical work. This is also true of

²³⁵ Evan Thompson, "Neurophenomenology and Contemplative Experience," in *The Oxford Handbook of Science and Religion*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 232.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 227.

phenomenology.²³⁷

The phenomenological method consists of three consecutive and carefully delineated phases: (1) the epoché; (2) the phenomenological reduction; and (3) intersubjective corroboration.

The first step, the *epoché*, is best described as a *phenomenological attitude*. It replaces what Husserl called our “natural attitude”²³⁸ that governs our everyday life in which we are naïve and uncritical. In this natural attitude we unreflectively posit the world as something existing “out there” and independently of us.²³⁹ While we walk in the world that we encounter, we focus on specific things: “thematic” matters (i.e., things that are an immediate theme of our conscious attention). We are also straightforwardly immersed in, and open to, the world as the “unthematic” context of our living and acting.²⁴⁰ This uncritical and straightforward immersion in the world phenomenologists refer to as our commonsensically naïve default position, in other words, our natural attitude.

The crucial first step in the phenomenological method is to replace this natural attitude with a more cautious one: the epoché. The term epoché is derived from Greek scepticism and indicates its function, namely to refrain from judgment. It means to suspend and bracket our natural attitude, including our theoretical beliefs about the world we otherwise uncritically posit and hold to correspond with an “objective reality”.

While the phenomenological attitude (the epoché) brackets our naïve commonsense attitude towards reality, its aim is neither to abandon nor to deny our natural attitude, nor to exclude the reality we so apprehend from consideration; but rather, to put it aside and neutralise it, so that we may attend to the very *experiences themselves* that are found therein.

²³⁷ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 19.

²³⁸ Klaus Held, “Husserl’s Phenomenological Method,” in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 17-21.

²³⁹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 17.

²⁴⁰ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. C. Carr. Evanston (IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 281.

Reality is not rejected, but dogmatic attitudes are put aside so that reality may be studied directly, just as it is given to us.²⁴¹ In this way, the epoché makes possible a genuinely philosophical treatment of the subject, because it is critical as well as non-dogmatic in its approach. It neither takes “objective reality” for granted, nor rigidly rejects it.²⁴² Hence it avoids replacing the natural attitude with just another biased metaphysical view.

Once the epoché is successful we take the second methodological step, i.e. the *phenomenological reduction*. Here we direct our attention to phenomena (incl. the world) as we experience them. The idea is to attend to the “correlational structure of our subjectivity”²⁴³ and the appearance of the world strictly as it phenomenally manifests to us, or we might wish to say, as it is *disclosed* to our awareness.

The phenomenological reduction denotes a further shift to a more radical philosophical attitude in which we analyse this correlational interdependence of particular structures of our subjectivity and particular modes of appearance.²⁴⁴ The notion “reduction” means that we redirect our attention away from our uncritical and unthematic, natural mode (attitude), and towards the way phenomena appear to us. This means that the phenomenological reduction is a “leading back” (*re-ducere*) of our everyday mode of unexamined experiencing to the phenomena themselves as a reflective theme of our attention. With this reflective move we are no longer interested in what things are in some metaphysical and theoretical context, but how they appear to us, precisely as immediately disclosed in our experience, and hence as the strict correlates of our lived subjectivity.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 23.

²⁴² Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 18.

²⁴³ See Chapter 2.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 20. See also Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 25.

²⁴⁵ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 25, and Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 18-19

To review, the epoché and the phenomenological reduction are performed in the first-person. As a whole, the *phenomenological reduction* comprises two basic steps. The first step brackets our natural attitude, and the second leads attention back to the phenomenological attitude that focuses on how reality is disclosed to us. This process corresponds to the epoché, which is a trainable mental skill that (a) suspends unthematic immersion in experience and (b) redirects attention to how things appear to us, making them the theme of our reflective and analytical attitude. This in turn relies on our capacity to voluntarily direct our attention, stabilise it in a given mode of presentation, and sustain it in this mode with the purpose of encountering experience in a renewed fashion: with heightened awareness and sensitivity.²⁴⁶

Following these first two steps, phenomenologists seek to intersubjectively corroborate their findings via phenomenological descriptions. The main concern with this step is to replicate discoveries and to assess the degree to which the correlative structures they have discerned are universal and intersubjectively sharable. To do justice to this challenge of describing subjectivity, the pragmatics of articulation focus on depicting experiences as they are lived-through, rather than as they are hypothesised to be on the basis of a priori commitments or experientially unguided theories.²⁴⁷ To accomplish this, subjects are first trained to consistently apply referential terms that they themselves choose for their own “cognitive contexts” (their phenomenal invariants) before their first-person knowledge is correlated to phenomena that are objectively observable. Only once this first step is successful will the process begin to carefully calibrate first-person data with third-person data. In this way, first-person knowledge is intersubjectively shared and crosschecked, as well as novel third-person data discovered that accounts for the biological and cognitive

²⁴⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 19.

²⁴⁷ Antoine Lutz and Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology: Integrating Subjective Experience and Brain Dynamics in the Neuroscience of Consciousness,” in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10:9-10 (2003): 38.

processes underlying the subjects' lived-through phenomenal dynamics.²⁴⁸

Thus the phenomenological method is a first-person approach to the study of lived experience. It attempts to make first-person knowledge intersubjectively sharable and thereby allows for further confirmation or disconfirmation. The lived-through subjectivity becomes accessible via reporting that can be calibrated with third-person data by integrating the three methodological steps of the phenomenological approach into the experimental protocols of scientific research. It is thus objective in two senses: (1) it is critical and without prejudice, i.e. it brackets biases prior to rigorously attending and analysing experience; and (2) it can be shared, crosschecked, and calibrated with third-person methods. This makes phenomenological descriptions both intersubjectively as well as “interobjectively” (third-personally) accessible.

3.1.2 *The Contemplative Method*

There is a new current in phenomenology that seeks to refine the pragmatics of the epoché to investigate consciousness. To this end, the dynamics of the epoché are explored as they are encountered in other traditions. One example of this is the phenomenological philosophy and contemplative mental training of Buddhism.²⁴⁹ This novel trend is responding to a neglected component of phenomenology, because phenomenology has to a large extent focused on the

²⁴⁸ Antoine Lutz, Jean-Philippe Lachaux, Jacques Martinerie, Francisco J. Varela, “Guiding the Study of Brain Dynamics by Using First-Person Data: Synchrony Patterns Correlate with Ongoing Conscious States during a Simple Visual Task,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in the United States of America* 99:3 (Feb. 5, 2002): 1590; and Anthony Ian Jack and Andreas Roepstorff, “Introspection and Cognitive Brain Mapping: From Stimulus-response to Script-report,” *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences* 6:8 (Aug., 2002): 337. Calibration between first-person reportable “cognitive contexts” and third-person observation in neurophenomenology has also led to the capability to predict the onset of epileptic discharges such that neuropsychological strategies can be explored to control epileptic seizures. See Evan Thompson and Francisco J. Varela, “Radical Embodiment: Neural Dynamics and Consciousness,” *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences* 5:10 (Oct., 2001): 423. Further calibration work between first- and third-person data has shown that when a subject is actively involved in identifying and describing his own phenomenal invariants, then these can be used to identify and describe the accompanying neurobiological dynamics of the “experiential categories” in question. A pilot study in neurophenomenology has demonstrated that original phenomenological categories make it possible for researchers to detect original neurodynamical patterns. See Antoine Lutz and Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology: Integrating Subjective Experience and Brain Dynamics in the Neuroscience of Consciousness,” in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10:9-10 (2003): 42.

²⁴⁹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 20.

philosophical rather than the psychological attitude of the phenomenological method. Thus it has emphasised theoretical analysis over the pragmatics of the epoché as the necessary live component of the investigation of consciousness. In contrast, the pragmatics of the epoché in contemplative traditions (for example, the practice of mindfulness-awareness in the Buddhist tradition) are far more developed.²⁵⁰ The reason for this is that they have established very detailed and well-refined guidance protocols for mental cultivation.²⁵¹ They are also phenomenologically and philosophically very precise in conceptualizing the states of consciousness they focus on in their first-personal investigation.²⁵²

The generic development of first-person methods by drawing on contemplative techniques of other traditions is one of the most important and innovative currents in contemporary cognitive science. It is also a direct response to a pointer William James gave in his classic work *The Principles of Psychology* over a century ago:

The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will... An education which should improve this faculty would be *the education par excellence*. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about.²⁵³

James's ideal, to be able to train and refine concentration, is a skill contemplatives hone with great care and have also done so for the past three millennia, East and West.²⁵⁴ Hence the basic idea of this new trend is to draw on the skill and experience available in other traditions

²⁵⁰ Antoine Lutz and Evan Thompson, "Neurophenomenology: Integrating Subjective Experience and Brain Dynamics in the Neuroscience of Consciousness," in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10:9-10 (2003): 38.

²⁵¹ Ibid. See also Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 23-31; Jonathan Shear and Ron Jevning, "Pure Consciousness: Scientific Exploration of Meditation Techniques," in *The View From Within: First-Person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*, eds. Francisco Varela and Jonathan Shear (Imprint Academic, 2002), 190; B. Alan Wallace, *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 136; and Antoine Lutz, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An Introduction," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 521-530.

²⁵² Ibid., 521; and George Dreyfus and Evan Thompson, "Asian Perspectives: Indian Theories of Mind," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 91.

²⁵³ William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950), 127.

²⁵⁴ B. Alan Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 42.

to “augment”²⁵⁵ the epoché of the phenomenological method. In this way, contemplative phenomenology is becoming a partner to the scientific study of consciousness.²⁵⁶

When contemplative practitioners attend to and philosophically reflect on states of consciousness they have encountered, they practice phenomenology.²⁵⁷ Most important is the experiential and immediate approach of contemplative practitioners to the first-personal investigation of consciousness. I want to consider such approaches by comparing the common logic of such contemplative work with the epoché.

The epoché has three intertwining phases: (1) to suspend beliefs and other operative theoretical constructs that are habitual, and adopt an unprejudiced attitude; (2) to redirect attention to the qualities of the experiencing process itself moment by moment; and (3) to “let go” and adopt a receptive stance that allows for novel discoveries to be made in the field of experience.²⁵⁸

Contemplative mental cultivation shares the same basic logic, although various traditions might adopt different mechanics in their procedures.²⁵⁹

First, they deeply question our habitual way of contextualizing the world, and also frequently adopt a dis-ontological stance to avoid reifying *things*, immanent or

²⁵⁵ By this I mean that a higher level of practical rigor is achieved in both steps of the epoché. First, contemplative practitioners are able to more effectively disengage from habitual cognitive modalities, and in this way better realise the first step of the epoché: to suspend the natural attitude. Second, contemplative practitioners have increased attention skills and more precise and reliable cognitive faculties to apply the second step: to redirect attention to how reality is disclosed to us. I will discuss these two points in greater detail later in this chapter.

²⁵⁶ Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology and Contemplative Experience,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Science and Religion*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 230.

²⁵⁷ David Woodruff Smith, “Phenomenology,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/> (Accessed February 8 2010).

²⁵⁸ Antoine Lutz and Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology: Integrating Subjective Experience and Brain Dynamics in the Neuroscience of Consciousness,” in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10:9-10 (2003): 37; and Antoine Lutz, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, “Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 521-530.

²⁵⁹ Jonathan Shear, “Closing the Empirical Gap,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The “Hard Problem”*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 372.

transcendent.²⁶⁰ They put aside our commonsensical considerations about reality to allow their own investigations to teach them, on the basis of experience.²⁶¹ Because experience takes precedence over theory, the processes we find are not “constructive” but “de-automotive” and “de-constructive”, enabling the subject *to release and unhitch experience from preconceptions*.²⁶²

Second, they employ various techniques to develop attention as a precise instrument of observation, i.e. concentration that does not succumb to erratic shifts of excitation and laxity, so that a single-pointed focus can be maintained without being distracted.²⁶³

Finally, they instruct contemplative practitioners to “forget”, “lay aside”, “put behind a cloud of forgetting”, “cease”, “restrain”, or “put to rest”,²⁶⁴ willful and disturbing influences so that novel discoveries become possible.

New discoveries can be made when first-person researchers subject themselves to intense contemplative mental training, because a suitable tool for observing “mental”

²⁶⁰ Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6.

²⁶¹ For a discussion of the inter-relationships between doctrine (i.e., paradigms allegiance and a priori metaphysical commitments), reason, and experience in scientific and contemplative traditions see B. Alan Wallace, “Keynote II to Mind & Reality: A Multidisciplinary Symposium on Consciousness (February, 2006),” <http://mindandreality.org/seminarkey.html> (accessed July 20, 2010).

²⁶² This may stand in contrast to common ideas about religion; however, as Thompson has correctly pointed out, “religion”, as it is understood in the West, is not a suitable description for the kinds of practices here in question. Note that it is not my intent to explore the relationship between mysticism and religion in this paper. What I do wish to emphasise, however, is that we can find contemplative traditions and practitioners in tension with the religious traditions they emerge from. It is also frequently the case that contemplative traditions rely more rigorously on philosophical discourse and the investigation of reality through first-personal phenomenology. Thus, reality as it is disclosed to the subject first-personally, in such cases, takes precedence over a priori theory, dogma, or doctrine. See Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology and Contemplative Experience,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Science and Religion*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 227. See also Robert K. C. Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness* (State University of New York Press, 1999), 99.

²⁶³ B. Alan Wallace, *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 136, and B. Alan Wallace, *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Towards A New Science of Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 107. Lutz *et al.* discuss Buddhist śamatha-practice as an example of how intense sustained attention on an object can be developed. See Antoine Lutz, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, “Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 505-508.; and J. A. Brefczynski-Lewis, A. Lutz, H. S. Schaefer, D. B. Levinson, and R. J. Davidson, “Neural Correlates of Attentional Expertise in Long-term Meditation Practitioners,” *PNAS* (Jul., 2007): 11483, 11487.

²⁶⁴ Robert K. C. Forman, “Introduction,” in *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.

phenomena is employed: a kind of telescope for the mind analogous to Galileo's use of the telescope.²⁶⁵ Just as Galileo initiated a scientific revolution, possibly the greatest to date, by directly observing celestial phenomena, so the scientific revolution of the mind sciences would require the development of suitable first-person methodologies to observe mental phenomena.

Galileo had a huge impact because he offered science for the first time a tool to observe with great precision celestial phenomena, which were objects of scientific inquiry previously only studied by recording the terrestrial correlates of celestial phenomena. This is also known as folk astronomy or astrology, and the naked eye observation of the heavens. However, Galileo was not satisfied with this and attended directly to the celestial phenomena by virtue of developing a tool suitable for more precise astronomical observation.

If we develop skillful attention via contemplative mental training to rigorously inspect the (mental) phenomena of consciousness, then we are engaging in a similar project. We offer more professional methods for empirical research on the basis of experience and observation that are more systematic, accurate, and reliable than folk observation.

The view that observational astronomy and contemplation are analogous holds in many respects, even though they are disanalogous in their epistemic modes (i.e., third- vs. first-person operations). First, as already noted, contemplative traditions offer approaches to mental cultivation that are well developed, systematised, and rigorous in application. Second, we also know that persons who are professionally trained in first-person methods (in particular subjects who are professionally trained in formal practices of meditation) enjoy

²⁶⁵ B. Alan Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 43-49; and B. Alan Wallace, "Keynote II to Mind & Reality: A Multidisciplinary Symposium on Consciousness (February, 2006)," <http://mindandreality.org/seminarkey.html> (accessed July 20, 2010).

noteworthy changes in their cognitive faculties as well as an increase in precision and reliability.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ Antoine Lutz, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An Introduction," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 521-530; and Heleen A. Slagter, Antoine Lutz, Lawrence L. Greischar, Sander Nieuwenhuis, and Richard J. Davidson, "Theta Phase Synchrony and Conscious Target Perception: Impact of Intensive Mental Training," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 21:8 (2008): 1545. There are a number of recent neuroscientific studies on attention focused mental training which further support the claim that attention is a trainable skill, especially in the context of contemplative practices. See Antoine Lutz, Heleen A. Slagter, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, "Cognitive-emotional Interactions: Attention Regulation and Monitoring in Meditation," *TRENDS in Cognitive Science* 12:4 (2008): 165. In a further study Lutz *et al.* point out that "focused attention meditation" not only affects distractor processing, but also target processing as well. The researchers involved judge this to be consistent with phenomenological descriptions of the techniques employed. Their study also supports the generic claim that "focused attention meditation" not only trains the ability to sustain stable and focused attention, but three additional regulative skills in relation to attention: (1) a monitoring capacity that is alert to distractions and helps stabilise attention on an object; (2) a disengaging ability that allows the practitioner to withdraw attention from distracting objects without retentive involvement; (3) a redirecting ability that helps to re-orient attention promptly and thematise the chosen object of attention. See Antoine Lutz, Heleen A. Slagter, Nancy B. Rawlings, Andrew D. Francis, Lawrence L. Greischar, and Richard J. Davidson, "Mental Training Enhances Attentional Stability: Neural and Behavioral Evidence," *The Journal of Neuroscience* (Oct., 2009): 13425-13426. A different study from Lewis *et al.* on the neural basis of "one-pointed concentration" shows that novices have more activations in regions of the brain related to thoughts and emotions in contrast to adepts who have increased activations in regions related to inhibition and attention. This suggests that these are plastic mechanisms, and thus trainable. See J. A. Brefczynski-Lewis, A. Lutz, H. S. Schaefer, D. B. Levinson, and R. J. Davidson, "Neural Correlates of Attentional Expertise in Long-term Meditation Practitioners," *PNAS* (Jul., 2007): 11483, 11487. A related study showed that mindfulness training increased cognitive performance of attentional subsystems, which included: alerting, orienting, and conflict monitoring. See Amishi P. Jha, Jason Krompinger, and Michael J. Baime, "Mindfulness Training Modifies Systems of Attention," *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioural Neuroscience* 7:2 (2007): 109, 115-117. Carter *et al.* study also showed that Tibetan monks - with a refined ability (i) to control the flow of objects which they attend too, and (ii) to access consciousness itself - who practice two different types of meditation practice ("compassion" and "single-point"), measurably alter the normal fluctuation in their conscious state that are induced by binocular rivalry and motion-induced blindness. The results indicate that single-point styles of mental training lead to increases in perceptual dominance durations when attending to objects, also in cases where vision switches because of attentional rivalry. See O. L. Carter, D. E. Presti, C. Callistemon, Y. Ungerer, G. B. Liu, and J. D. Pettigrew, "Meditation Alters Perceptual Rivalry in Tibetan Buddhist Monks," *Current Biology* 15:11 (2005): R412-R413. Whether or not mental training has any lasting effect on practitioners is answered by Slagter *et al.* who show in their longitudinal study that mental training results in long-term changes in both brain and behaviour. See Heleen A. Slagter, Antoine Lutz, Lawrence L. Greischar, Andrew D. Francis, Sander Nieuwenhuis, James M. Davis, Richard J. Davidson, "Mental Training Affects Distribution of Limited Brain Resources," *PLOS Biology* 5:6 (2007): 1228, 1233-1234. Lutz *et al.* support this finding in a study on "non-referential compassion meditation" with Buddhist practitioners of the Tibetan Nyingmapa and Kagyupa traditions. They conclude that mental training leads to short- and long-term neural changes as well as long-lasting changes in cognition and emotion. See Antoine Lutz, Lawrence L. Greischar, Nancy B. Rawlings, Matthieu Ricard, and Richard J. Davidson, "Long-term Mediators Self-induce High Amplitude Gamma Synchrony During Mental Practice," *PNAS* (Nov., 2004): 16336, 16372-16373. Finally, Lazar *et al.* show that not only does long-term meditation practice alter resting electroencephalogram patterns (suggesting long-lasting changes in brain activity), but it also changes the brain's physical structure. First, brain regions that are associated with attention, interoception and sensory processing have shown to be thicker in meditative practitioners than non-meditators. Second, the data provides first structural evidence that cortical plasticity, that is, actual changes in the brain's physical structure, is experience-dependent with meditation practice. See Sara W. Lazar, Catherine E. Kerr, Rachel H. Wasserman, Jeremy R. Gray, Douglas N. Greve, Michael T. Treadway, Metta McGarvey, Brian T. Quinn, Jeremy A. Dusek, Herbert Benson, Scott L. Rauch, Christopher I. Moore, and Bruce Fischl, "Meditation Experience is Associated with Increased Cortical Thickness," *NeuroReport* 16:17 (Nov., 2005): 1893, 1895-1896.

We can appreciate that contemplative professionals have more accurate and reliable cognitive capacities at their disposal when we consider the case of “field-independent” perception. Batson and Ventis define field independence as “the ability to perceive objects as they are, without having that perception distorted by either environmental cues or habitual modes of seeing.”²⁶⁷ Pelletier measured the effect meditation has on perception by presenting trained and untrained individuals with complex cognitive tasks that required of them to resist preconceptions and familiar cognitive contexts, which provided reality orientation, in order to succeed.²⁶⁸ Even the more conservative scholars Batson and Ventis, who evaluated Pelletier’s research, concluded that the meditators demonstrated decisively more accuracy than the non-meditators in the relevant tests.

The results are even more convincing when we consider that all participants were non-meditators at the outset and were subjected to the tests at the very start of the study: no member of any group differed in their test results at that point. Batson and Ventis conclude that “meditation enabled [the subjects] to see things more for what they were, independent of personal preconceptions and distracting environmental cues.”²⁶⁹ The results of this research were possible after only three months of training in meditative techniques and cannot be compared to professionals who might have as much as 5,000 to 50,000 hours training, 8 to 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, for months or years on end.²⁷⁰ This shows that it is possible to refine our cognitive capacities through rigorous contemplative training, and that the analogy of a telescope of the mind holds, that is, that subjects professionally trained in first-person methods do have at their disposal cognitive faculties that are more precise and more reliable.

²⁶⁷ C. Daniel Batson and W. Larry Ventis, *The Religious Experience: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 123.

²⁶⁸ Kenneth R. Pelletier, “Influence of Transcendental Meditation on Autokinetic Perception,” in *Meditation: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Shapiro, Jr., Deane H., and Walsh, Roger N. (Aldine Transaction, 2008.), 223-226.

²⁶⁹ C. Daniel Batson and W. Larry Ventis, *The Religious Experience: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 124.

²⁷⁰ B. Alan Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 44. See fn. 266 for a list of related and supporting research, some of which is also conducted on long-term meditative practitioners of up to 40 years experience.

I contend that contemplatives are not only more accurate and reliable when they attend to perceptual kinds of experience, but also when they attend to non-perceptual kinds of conscious states. They have the capacity to disclose more accurately non-intentional, pre-reflective conscious states that pertain to the subjective pole of consciousness (not its “intentional acts”²⁷¹).

This kind of acquaintance raises questions about the role of self-awareness and how self-awareness can reflexively know itself, possibly even without re-introducing a subject-object dichotomy. I will argue that this is possible. What is important now is the following: A non-perceptual experience cannot be consciously apprehended by objectifying mechanisms of mind or consciousness. If that were the case, a phenomenologically transitive structure would be re-introduced, and we would by definition not be dealing with a non-perceptual kind of experience. In this case, we would indeed have to conclude that there are no such experiences, as many philosophers believe.

However, if we accept that non-perceptual kinds of experience do exist and can be consciously attended “to”, or maybe “in”, for lack of a better vocabulary, then we can safely say that such conscious “attending” can only be achieved by refraining from habitual tendencies to objectify awareness. Meditators are trained to do this. They are trained to “settle down”²⁷² the activities and fluctuations that continuously provoke objectifying intentions, so that intransitive and pre-reflective states of consciousness can be brought “to” or disclosed “to” awareness.

²⁷¹ Intentional acts are instances of consciousness in which objects are intentionally (vectorially and directionally) attended to. Such acts comprise both the object that is intended (the “noema”) as well as the act of intending (the “noesis”), i.e. that which the subject brings to the act of intending. This act is considered to be a distinctly identifiable mental phenomenon, although not a separated one. I discussed intentional acts in my section on the “intentionality” of consciousness. See Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 24-25.

²⁷² B. Alan Wallace, *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* [Chapter 7. *Śamatha: The Contemplative Refinement of Attention*] (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 142-148. Shear offers some further points about the processes operative in contemplative mental training. See Jonathan Shear, “Closing the Empirical Gap,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The “Hard Problem”*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 372.

In fact, as Deikmann,²⁷³ Forman,²⁷⁴ and Batson and Ventis have pointed out,²⁷⁵ contemplative practices are processes of “de-automatisation”: they deconstruct old automatised perceptual patterns that stop the supply of stimuli and mental content to awareness such that it can recede into its “natural state”, or its own “space of awareness”.²⁷⁶ Batson and Ventis conclude that “the meditator is able to break down his or her present reality. Approaching one-pointedness, the current cognitive organization begins to disintegrate... its role is eliminative, not constructive.”²⁷⁷ Consequently, if non-perceptual experiences do exist that are devoid of constructive processes, then the contemplative practitioner is in the most suitable position to “observe” such phenomena. I will argue below that contemplative practitioners do indeed have access to such states.

To sum up, I have introduced the phenomenological and contemplative method respectively, and I pointed out (i) how neurophenomenology has turned to the contemplative method, because the phenomenological method has not given adequate attention to the pragmatics of the epoché; (ii) that both the phenomenological method and the contemplative method have methodological steps in place that share a logic; and (iii) that professionally trained subjects in contemplative methods have at their disposal cognitive faculties that are more precise and more reliable, which (iv) make contemplative phenomenologists most suitable to examine non-perceptual types of experience.

In the next chapter, I will respond to some sceptical challenges to first-person methods. I will follow this by arguing in Chapter 5 that contemplative practitioners do in fact have “cognitive access” to the relevant non-perceptual types of experience.

²⁷³ Arthur Deikman, “Deautomatisation and the Mystic Experience,” in *Altered States of Consciousness*, ed. Charles Tart. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969, 23-44.

²⁷⁴ Robert K. C. Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*, State University of New York Press, 1999), 95-107.

²⁷⁵ C. Daniel Batson and W. Larry Ventis, *The Religious Experience: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 116-119.

²⁷⁶ B. Alan Wallace, *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* [Chapter 7. *Śamatha: The Contemplative Refinement of Attention*] (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 144-145.

²⁷⁷ C. Daniel Batson and W. Larry Ventis, *The Religious Experience: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 118-119.

Chapter 4

Scepticism about First-Person (Phenomenological) Approaches

Physicality turns out to be not at all essential to what it is to be “scientific”. For, as scientists and philosophers of science have both so often brought out, it is not ontological considerations such as the physicality of objects referred to that properly decide whether or not a claim is scientific, but methodological considerations of whether the claim can be (or has been) intersubjectively corroborated and/or falsified according to the proper sorts of experimental protocols. Thus the independence of the observer that is paradigmatically relevant to scientific methodology, and thus science itself, is that of truth of conclusions, rather than that of objects referred to.²⁷⁸

Jonathan Shear

Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself.²⁷⁹

Merleau-Ponty

An important question is this: How well can the phenomenological method succeed in accounting for intentional states (the objective pole) and for self-awareness (the subjective pole)? In this respect, many questions (objections) can be raised about the ideas I presented in the last chapter. Some of the most important are:

(1) Is the phenomenological and contemplative approach discussed here merely a revision of introspection, a project which has already failed in the eyes of our scientific community?

(2) There is nothing that can be really referred to as introspective observation, because the notion of “observation” presupposes the distinction between the thing seen and the seeing of it (just like in our extrospective, scientific models); however, for “introspection” there is no way to make this separation.²⁸⁰ Thus Comte rightfully asks: “The organ observed and the

²⁷⁸ See Jonathan Shear, “Closing the Empirical Gap,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The “Hard Problem”*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 368-369.

²⁷⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 407.

²⁸⁰ John R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 97.

organ observing being, in this case, identical, how could observation take place?”²⁸¹

(3) Both non-introspective reports about the world as well as introspective reports have been demonstrated to be unreliable. Why then consider “inner perception” as a systematic approach to the study of mental phenomena?

(4) Does phenomenology (philosophical and contemplative) view the mind as having its referential powers independent of the world? In other words, is the mind completely self-contained?²⁸²

(5) Does the epoché mean that we bracket the transcendent (exterior) spatio-temporal world (the “other”), and in so doing we account for internal mental representations only, or does the epoché mean that we continue to investigate the transcendent (exterior) spatio-temporal world, however, with a different attitude?²⁸³

(6) Is the noema (the intended object) an internal mental representation, which opens the gates to idealism, or is the noema the manner in which intended and actual objects are given to us?²⁸⁴

(7) Does not meta-awareness, that is, the reflection or monitoring of conscious experience itself, change the experience in question? How can we then study experience *as it is actually given* to us?

(8) Can introspection, which relies on a subject-object dichotomy of a reflectively operating consciousness, apprehend non-reflective, intransitive self-awareness – the very foundation of our subjectivity? Does not reflection on pre-reflective subjectivity change its structure? How then can self-awareness be consciously attended to?

(9) Philosophers have pervasively argued against the possibility that consciousness can persist without any objectifying processes. They have also frequently commented on the fact

²⁸¹ William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950), 180. Cited, using James’ translation.

²⁸² Dan Zahavi, “Husserl’s Noema and the Internalism-Externalism Debate,” *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 42.

²⁸³ Ibid., 47

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 47-48.

that they are unable to locate any such phenomenon when “searching” the mind.²⁸⁵ Does this not demonstrate the falsity of the methodological possibilities present here, for example, the prospects of encountering a raw condition of “awareness per se”?

Objections one to seven question what kind of access we can have to the intentional feature of consciousness (object-pole). Objections eight and nine focus on our cognitive access to the self-aware feature of consciousness (the ego-pole). I will respond to objections eight and nine in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively. In the remainder of this chapter, I will address in turn the first seven objections.

4.1 *Objection 1: Introspection is a Failed Project*

Are phenomenological and contemplative first-person methods merely a variant form of the introspective project, which failed and was abandoned in the early 20th century? The answer is decidedly: No. Why is this? To answer this question, we must first understand what kind of introspective project is being referred to in this objection.

A formal “introspectionist school” first appeared in the latter half of the seventeenth century and lasted until the first decade of the 20th century. One of the most notable associated names of this school is that of German physiologist and psychologist Wilhelm Wundt.²⁸⁶ Wundt faced the challenge of presenting a model of introspection that could observe subjective phenomena analogously to the well-established scientific model that could extrospectively observe physical phenomena. To do so, he constructed an introspective method that approximated the conditions of external perception. Thus he went to great lengths to control the external conditions of introspection:²⁸⁷ Subjects were only allowed to attend to simple visual stimuli and report within the confines of a pre-existing theoretical

²⁸⁵ Jonathan Shear, “Closing the Empirical Gap,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The “Hard Problem”*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 370.

²⁸⁶ Eric Schwitzgebel, “Introspection,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/introspection/> (Accessed July 22, 2010).

²⁸⁷ B. Alan Wallace, *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Towards A New Science of Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 77.

framework expressed in rules and cognitive prescriptions. The presentation of stimuli was brief and exactly timed; the reactions of the subjects were recorded.

In this system, the practice of introspection was separated from philosophical introspection and contemplative first-person methods, which were designed just for the purpose of attending to conscious experience. In contrast, introspective psychology differentiated itself by restricting its introspective observations to simple perceptual stimuli, and only under manipulated conditions and external restraints. This excluded all mental phenomena that displayed more complexity, such as thoughts, feelings, volitions, or mental imagery, etc. The “inner observations” were framed by a monumental volume of rules and regulations that transformed the practice similar to an esoteric rite.²⁸⁸

We can respond to the comparison of the first-person methods I presented earlier with Wundt’s classical introspective psychology in several ways. First, the phenomenological and contemplative approaches to experience I discussed start by “bracketing out” theoretical and metaphysical commitments prior to attending to experience, in contrast to determining the internal investigations in terms of them.

Second, the practice of introspection I just outlined above investigated to confirm the theories individual researchers established *a priori*. Thus the researchers of different labs constructed theoretical views independently of each other, and translated their theories into strict rules and protocols that defined the external conditions in which the “introspection” practices were executed. In this way, subjects were trained to attend to their observations so that they would confirm the theories.

The methods I presented stand in contrast to this: They put experience over theoretical commitments, and they have methodological steps in place to secure to the best of their ability that an objective, unbiased attitude can be maintained in their investigations.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

Additionally, the methods themselves are designed to “unhitch” experience from preconceptions and habitual modes of cognitive functioning, such that attention is refined and reality attended to *as it is*, or at least in a decisively more accurate way. Hence the methods I have presented deconstruct, de-automate, and eliminate external influences (i.e., they increase “field-independence”) rather than construct, mediate, and pre-define the experiences to be had, by introducing external conditions and constraints to ensure control over cognitive functioning (i.e., they increase “field-dependence”).

Third, the introspective school trained their subjects to respond to stimuli under external constraints, so that internal observations became a “search” for what the theories predicted. Nowhere in this process do we find the training of attention skills *in and of themselves* as a means to attend to experience *as it is*. Rather, subjects were trained to attend to experience *as it should be* via the help of the pragmatic mechanisms that actualised their pre-existing theoretical commitments in pragmatic form. Hence we do not find in the introspective school the project of refining mental alertness and attention skills proper as a tool for *observing the phenomena in themselves* and *as they present themselves* to the subject – which would make novel discoveries possible, as it is the case in the common logic of phenomenological and contemplative methods.

Therefore, (i) the first-person methods I presented earlier and the methods of the introspectionist school differ markedly in how they logically operate and how they are practically realised; (ii) most of the disagreements that compromised the introspectionist school were due to clashing *a priori* theories and a flawed operational logic of their pragmatics.²⁸⁹ It is wrong to assume that these theoretical and practical errors also apply to the decisively different operational logic and pragmatics of phenomenological and contemplative first-person methods.

²⁸⁹ Evan Thompson, “Neurophenoemenology and Contemplative Experience,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Science and Religion*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 229.

4.2 *Objection 2: Introspective Observation is Impossible*

Comte and Searle argue that the very notion of observation is a fallacy, because first-person phenomena cannot be observed at all: first-person observations are in fact themselves that which is supposed to be observed. The traditional observer/observed distinction cannot be upheld in the case of introspective observation. Hence it does not conform to our scientific models that rely on just this distinction between observation and the thing observed. I quote Searle's rather surprising conclusion on this:

I cannot observe my own subjectivity, for any observation that I might care to make is itself that which was supposed to be observed; consciousness is not known by introspection in a way analogous to the way objects in the world are known by perception.²⁹⁰

My first response to this is that a considerable body of empirical knowledge generated in the field of cognitive development tells us a different story. I refer in particular to how young children develop a "theory of mind" and the commonsensical mental/physical distinction of adult awareness, which does not exist in earlier stages.²⁹¹ While "childhood realism" is still debated today, there is a platform of consensus upon which this debate is being conducted that is decisive for my purposes here.²⁹²

First, the cognitive structure of earlier stages is significantly different from the later emerging adult awareness. Second, the earliest stages have no clear distinction between mental and physical phenomena; all phenomena are equally "real" or "unreal" to the subject. Third, young children come to have various sorts of experiences throughout their cognitive development. Fourth, they learn to integrate a subset of their experiences to accord with the

²⁹⁰ John R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 97; 105.

²⁹¹ L. Kohlberg, "Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Socialisation," in *Handbook of Socialisation Research*, ed. D. A. Goslin (Rand McNally & Co, 1969), 357. Wellman also conducted research into the paradigm features of ordinary adult understanding that distinguishes mental from physical. While Wellman concluded to the contrary of Kohlberg on whether children have a theory of mind or not, and when such a theory might emerge, his data still confirmed that young children have to develop such a theory and that the mental/physical distinction is absent in earlier stages. See H. M Wellman, *The Child's Theory of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 3-11.

²⁹² See Jonathan Shear, "Closing the Empirical Gap," in *Explaining Consciousness: The "Hard Problem"*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 365-366.

features of physical objects. Fifth, the young children discover that the behaviour of other people sometimes supports their integrations (i.e. classifications) and sometimes not. Sixth, they generate the distinction between public physical objects (i.e., extrospective phenomena) and private mental objects (i.e., introspective phenomena). Finally, the young children become progressively proficient in sorting out their experiences according to these formed categories of mental and physical, but not without errors in the learning process.

To sum up, we distinguish between the mental and the physical on the basis of a cognitive development in which such a distinction was originally absent. We eventually form habitual and automatic modes that distinguish for us between the two categories on the basis of a process reliant on criteria that grants intersubjective access and crosschecking.²⁹³ What does this empirical data on cognitive development tell us about Searle's analysis of introspection?

If we understand cognitive development in the manner outlined above, then we must conclude that Searle's account of introspection is mistaken. Recall that Searle argued that internal observation is an incoherent concept, because the very notion of observation presupposes a distinction between the act of observation and that which is observed, but, according to Searle, this distinction is absent in first-person experience of mental phenomena. The empirical data that we have available on our cognitive development indicates to the contrary that introspection (internal phenomena) and extrospection (external phenomena) are in fact not so different in kind as Searle makes them out to be. Note that a child has to actually *learn* through investigation and intersubjective corroboration which experiences are to be categorised as mental and which as physical.

This analysis of cognitive development in turn supports a more straightforward response to Searle: It is arbitrary to claim that the content of an experience – which can also

²⁹³ Ibid.

be described phenomenologically (e.g., as “seeing a golden pattern resembling that of a golden statute”) – can only be observed and subsequently investigated if and only if the experience is genuinely of an external, sensory object, that is, an experience of the exogenous-perceptual kind. As we have seen, endogenous- (observation of internal, mental objects) and exogenous-perceptual instances (observation of external, “physical” objects) actually do not differ in the way Searle specifies: experiences are what they are and can be attended to whether or not they are internal or external. Thus both mental and physical experiences

can be observed, examined, evaluated, and judged (correctly or not) to be objective [an exogenous- or endogenous-perceptual kind of experience] or subjective [a non-perceptual kind of experience], quite *independently* of whether it ultimately turns out that it is an objective one (with an object different from the experience itself [a perceptual kind of experience]) or not.²⁹⁴ [Emphasis added]

If the above analysis holds, then the category of “observable experiences” is decidedly broader than Searle is willing to acknowledge, just as common sense would dictate. It is not only the case that “observable experiences” are broader, but they are broader than “objective experiences” (perceptual kinds of experience) and, according to cognitive developmental research, also prior to the mental/physical distinction. Thus Shear correctly points out that it is a fallacy to hold that mental phenomena themselves cannot be displayed by introspection analogously to how the physical world can be displayed by perception; and it is also an error to restrict the notion of observation to perception alone [perception].²⁹⁵

Shear’s conclusion confirms and is confirmed by my analysis of different structures of experience, namely perceptual (endogenous and exogenous) and non-perceptual ones. From a phenomenological point of view, endogenous-perceptual experiences, which are about internal mental phenomena, maintain a subject-object intentional (i.e., directed and vectorial) structure. These are analogous to exogenous-perceptual kinds of experience that have the

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 367.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 367-368.

same structure, but have external (e.g., physical) phenomena as their objects. Thus the observations of mental and physical phenomena are structurally analogous. Therefore, we are justified to hold that the notion of observation is coherent (and also necessary) in the case of external physical phenomena as well as internal mental phenomena, Searle to the contrary.

The actual issue is not the mental/physical divide, but whether first-person methods can examine perceptual kinds of experience (internal or external) that have a subject-object structure without changing the experiences too much; and how such methods can attend to non-perceptual kinds of experience that do not display a subject-object structure, also without changing their structure.

Gallagher and Zahavi point out that the phenomenological method is decidedly different from the traditional model of introspective observation, which requires taking experience itself as its object. They say:

First-person reports of this [phenomenological] kind are not introspective reports, if we think of introspection as a matter of reflective consciousness. They are nonetheless first-person, pre-reflective reports expressive of experience.²⁹⁶

To appreciate this we need to distinguish between two kinds of reports.²⁹⁷ The first is a report about the world, for example, did the truck drive by or not? The second kind of report is about experience itself, for example, what is it like to experience the truck driving by? In the first instance, similar to Wundt's approach to introspection, we approach reports by focusing on external conditions, or measuring reaction times, or we might wish to examine the neural correlates in the brain that accompany the experience – all third-person considerations. In the second instance, in contrast, we are concerned with the actual phenomenology of the experience from the first-person point of view. We can now ask: How does the subject know that the truck drove by? Does the subject introspect his experience? We might also wish to ask, how can the subject report her experience if he does not introspect?

²⁹⁶ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 15.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

Gallagher and Zahavi respond to this last question by pointing out that the tradition of phenomenology explains how we are aware of experience without reflecting upon it.²⁹⁸

According to the phenomenological tradition, we are aware of our experience without the help of introspection, because there is an inbuilt self-awareness in experience, which is what makes our experience a conscious experience. Hence we know our experience as we live it through without the requirement of a second-order introspective cognition, which would have to take experience as its object. This self-aware experience – the fact that I know the bus drives by in the very moment when the first-order experience occurs, it is already aware in the very happening of the experience – is implicit, non-objectifying, and pre-reflective (already operative prior to the act of reflection). On this view, when I am asked whether I see the bus drive by, then I can answer yes without backtracking my experience.²⁹⁹

I will further articulate this idea of implicit awareness in Chapter 5. For now I want to emphasise the following point: If we are interested in studying experience from the first-person point of view, that is, from a phenomenological point of view, then the attention to what it is like to experience does not require us to use classical introspective observation that separates the act of observation from that which is observed (the experience itself). This is a very important point, and it will also play an important role in understanding how phenomenological and contemplative methods can examine, for example, the subjective pole of consciousness (self-awareness). Thus the phenomenological approach distinguishes itself from classic introspection both in its logic (it focuses on first-person phenomenology, rather than third-person correlations) and its pragmatics (it attends to experience without introducing second-order observations).

However, we might also wish to respond to this challenge in a different way and affirm the importance of a second-order introspective observation, a kind of “meta-awareness”. If

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

we choose this route, then we have to offer a good response to objection seven, which expresses the worry that such acts of observation would change the very experiences we wish to examine.

4.3 Objection 3: Introspective Observation is Unreliable

A sceptic of introspection may argue that both non-introspective reports about the world as well as introspective reports have demonstrated to be unreliable. Why then consider “inner perception” as a systematic approach to the study of mental phenomena?

First, non-introspective reports have proven overall reliable as long as the stimuli that experimenters present to their subjects are above threshold.³⁰⁰ Reliability only decreases when subjects are presented with stimuli close to threshold and have to offer quick reports thereof. Reports become even less reliable in the presence of disturbing external and internal factors. However, I have already discussed that subjects who have trained their first-personal attention skills are able to perceive more field-independently, that is, they can attend to more complex and ambiguous phenomena more precisely in the presence of distracting influences.

Second, textbook history fails to tell us that the rival schools of classical, introspectionist psychology agreed as a whole on descriptions of introspective phenomenology, but disagreed on theoretical and causal interpretations.³⁰¹ As I have already discussed, the introspectionist school internally disagreed, because it was committed to theories over phenomenology. What do we learn from this? The important lesson is that first-person approaches to experience are not useless methods for collecting first-person data, i.e. descriptive accounts of lived-through experience, and that psychology has to be more careful in discerning the difference between phenomenological projects to describe experience and theoretical projects to explain causal relations.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 16.

³⁰¹ Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology and Contemplative Experience,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Science and Religion*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 229.

Studies that have demonstrated subjective reports to be unreliable have done so only by requiring of subjects to report on the causes of their mental events, not because they offered phenomenological descriptions.³⁰² Hence experimental subjects need to (i) learn how to pay attention to their cognitive processes and (ii) avoid giving causal-explanatory conjectures.³⁰³

If we view subjects as offering their beliefs about experience whenever they provide first-person statements about experience, then we misunderstand the role of first-person methods, and our interpretive strategy is misguided.³⁰⁴ To then further test whether the subjects “beliefs” are in concordance with the world and brain activity amounts to assuming analytical isomorphism; for example, we assume if we are dealing with mental images that the subpersonal activities in the brain (of which we are not conscious) must be depictive themselves. Dennett goes a step further in this project of equating descriptions of experience with beliefs about experience (beliefs which have no phenomenology). He quickly denies that the subpersonal experiences are depictive in the first place; rather, we falsely claim to have conscious experiences – we are misled and bewitched by defective modes thinking.³⁰⁵

If we do not buy into the idea that we only believe we experience and do not actually live through experiences consciously, and if we learn from history that there is a difference between describing how we experience and forming beliefs about the causes of our experience, then we can confidently say that first-person methods, which attend to experience phenomenologically, do fulfil their necessary function. As Thompson points out, “first person methods are methods that foster [the] ability to be present to one’s own experience,”³⁰⁶ and contemplative practitioners demonstrate that this ability is a trainable skill which can become more accurate. Such training would be analogous to Galileo’s attempt to refine the telescope,

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 307.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1991), 406.

³⁰⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 302.

which he rigorously applied to the observation of celestial phenomena. In this case, we attend to mental phenomena via refined attention skills instead of forming beliefs about our experience, or trying to account for the causes of our experience. Hence we choose to be present to our experiences and accurately report what it is like to undergo them.³⁰⁷ To conclude, phenomenological and contemplative first-person methods are decidedly not unreliable.

4.4 Objections 4 to 6: Representationalism and Phenomenology

To respond to objections 4 to 6, we must first discuss how phenomenology and representationalism differ in the way they conceive of the mind and intentional experience. My goal in this discussion is (i) to offer some background information that will allow me to show that objections 4 to 6 rely on a theory of mind that is not applicable to phenomenology, which makes it irreproachable to these matters; and (ii) to offer reasons to reject representationalism in order to open the way for an analysis of cognitive access that includes non-perceptual types of experience.³⁰⁸

Representationalism is an umbrella term for an alternative, non-phenomenological account of intentionality. This concept of “representation” is frequently referred to in analytic philosophy and the cognitive sciences.³⁰⁹ If we want to make progress in this project, it is important that we understand the difference between a phenomenological and a non-phenomenological account of intentionality. I reject representational theories of the mind and consciousness.

³⁰⁷ Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology and Contemplative Experience,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Science and Religion*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 228; and B. Alan Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 41-43.

³⁰⁸ I revisit representationalism later on in this chapter when I discuss issues surrounding our cognitive access to self-awareness. There I offer more reasons to reject this view.

³⁰⁹ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 111.

When analytic philosophers talk about “mental representations”, most assume that intentionality is representation. Siewert says: “Often, it is assumed: to have intentionality is to have content. And frequently mental content is otherwise described as representational... – and intentionality (at least, as this applies to the mind) is seen as just another word for what is called ‘mental representation’.”³¹⁰ Such a representation provides us with indirect access to something, i.e. it *represents* rather than *presents* something to our experience. Our contact to the object of our experience is therefore derivative and mediated through an intermediate entity.³¹¹ This mediating entity is considered to be a mental structure, such as a concept, an image, or a thought which has semantic properties. This content mentally “refers”, correctly or incorrectly, to the objects of experience. In this way, the representational content has truth-value and truth-conditions.³¹²

The mental structures which serve as mediating entities between subject and world are held to correspond to subpersonal, physical, and neural processes in the subject’s brain.³¹³ This is also called analytical isomorphism,³¹⁴ that is, the idea that we can only explain experience if there is a one-to-one correspondence between the phenomenal content of our personal experience and the subpersonal activity of the underlying neural processes (representations).³¹⁵ The underlying structure is subpersonal, because it does not account for the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the whole person. An example of this is when we try

³¹⁰ Charles Siewert, “Consciousness and Intentionality,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness-intentionality/> (accessed June 1, 2009).

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² William Lycan, “Representational Theories of Consciousness,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness-representational/> (accessed August 24, 2009).

³¹³ Alva Noë and J. Kevin O’Regan, “On the Brain-Basis of Visual Consciousness: A Sensorimotor Account,” in *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, eds. Alva Noë and Evan Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 567.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 584.

³¹⁵ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 273. It might also be interesting to take notice of Noë’s criticism of related scientific paradigms of consciousness, which hold that an adequate science thereof would have to establish an identify relation between consciousness and “underlying” events in the nervous system. He judges this to be “outdated reductionism” and proposes that we should rethink the foundations (the “starting-point assumptions”) of cognitive science. See Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (New York, Hill and Wang, 2009), vii–viii.

to explain the experience of mental imagery by pointing out neuronal processes on which the experience supposedly depends. Instead of attributing to a subject the experience of a three-dimensional object, we describe an area of the subject's brain that has a certain electromagnetic pattern.³¹⁶ The former is a personal and the latter is a subpersonal account.

Phenomenological analysis operates on the personal level, because it focuses on the constitutive features of experience as they are lived-through by the whole person. It intends to account for what it is like for the person to have a given experience. In contrast, mainstream cognitive science focuses on the subpersonal level, because it describes physical and/or functional processes that do not take into account the experience of the whole person – they do not take into account the first-person perspective.

Mental representations (content) are intermediate entities (corresponding to neuronal processes in the brain) often referred to as “mental images” or “sense data” etc.³¹⁷ To understand this more clearly, consider following analogy for representational content: Compare the difference between perceiving the “beehive” (New Zealand parliament) and taking a look at a photo of the beehive. In both cases we are directly related to the object of our experience – we are intentionally related to the beehive in an object-directed manner. However, in the first instance we are immediately confronted with the beehive itself, and in the second instance we are only indirectly related to the beehive. Our intentional relation to the beehive is through an intermediate entity, in this case a picture, which is analogous to a pictorial representation that refers us to the actual object.³¹⁸

The above analogy helps to see that representational content is not the object in itself, and it is definitely not the object of our cognition. Rather, mental content is that by which we

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 111. See also Alva Noë and Evan Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 567; and Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 79.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

cognise and are aware of objects in the world.³¹⁹ Intentional experience is representational in the sense that our access to the world is mediated by bridging entities that have descriptive content, i.e. they represent the world to us, and they represent the world to us in a particular way.

Considerable effort has been put into the attempt to naturalise intentionality by first accounting for intentionality in terms of representations and then accounting for our mental content (representations) in terms of subpersonal neuronal activity in the brain (non-intentional activities). One aim of representational theories is therefore to make the problem of consciousness more tractable to a physicalist view of nature.

However, it is a contentious issue whether or not mental representations require the external world for their existence. Some believe they are independent of the world (internalism), others believe that our mental contents depend on the world, or possibly even include it (externalism). Interestingly enough, most proponents of representationalism are committed to some version of content externalism, which puts pressure on reductive accounts of mental states.

Internalism is the view that a subject's beliefs and experiences are determined only by internal factors of the subject. By this I mean what happens within his skull; his experience is causally "brainbound".³²⁰ Mental content that is so constituted is considered to be "narrow".³²¹ For mental content to be narrow means that it is "individualistic" and not dependent on its environment.³²² Consequently, what happens in the subject's physical and

³¹⁹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 25.

³²⁰ Kent Bach, "Content: Wide vs. Narrow," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://online.sfsu.edu/~kbach/widenarr.html> (accessed May 28, 2009). See also Dan Zahavi, "Husserl's Noema and the Internalism-Externalism Debate," *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 42; and Sarah Sawyer, "There Is No Viable Notion of Narrow Content," in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Brian P. McLaughlin and Jonathan Cohen (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 20.

³²¹ Curtis Brown, "Narrow Mental Content," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/content-narrow/> (accessed June 1, 2009).

³²² Sarah Sawyer, "There Is No Viable Notion of Narrow Content," in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Brian P. McLaughlin and Jonathan Cohen (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 20.

cultural environment plays no role in defining his beliefs and experiences. In this respect, the meaning-content of a given experience *is* its object. Internalism, then, holds that experiences have an intentional relation to their objects solely on the basis of the subject's internal structure. The referential powers of the mind are independent of the world. Thus internalism implies the self-containedness of the mind.³²³

Externalism is the view that a subject's experiences are at least influenced by his environment, if not wholly determined by it.³²⁴ Mental content is not purely in the head, but it is constituted, at least in part, by what actually exists in the physical and cultural world.³²⁵ Such content is defined as "broad" and "anti-individualistic".³²⁶ This means that the mind extends into the environment, because its content is dependent on it. In this way, the identity of the mind is intertwined with the world; our experiences are of or about objects just because the external environment is what it is and not different; changes in the world are therefore accompanied by changes in our mind. In this way, the world is part of the content of our mind: our mental acts involve the world.³²⁷

We are now in a better position to flesh out the difference between representationalism and phenomenology.

On the one hand, representationalism is motivated by the intuition that it is difficult to conceive how our experiences can present us with objects without the help of some representational mediation. It is therefore assumed that the objects we cognise are outside our consciousness, but inside our minds we have representations (mediating entities that function as signs) that refer to those objects which exist in the outside world. Hence it is through the

³²³ Dan Zahavi, "Husserl's Noema and the Internalism-Externalism Debate," *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 42.

³²⁴ Anthony Brueckner, "Externalism and Privileged Access Are Consistent," in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Brian P. McLaughlin and Jonathan Cohen (Blackwell Publishing, 2007): 39.

³²⁵ Dan Zahavi, "Husserl's Noema and the Internalism-Externalism Debate," *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 42; and Gabriel Segal, "Cognitive Content and Propositional Attitude Attributions," in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Brian P. McLaughlin and Jonathan Cohen (Blackwell Publishing, 2007): 5.

³²⁶ Sarah Sawyer, "There Is No Viable Notion of Narrow Content," in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Brian P. McLaughlin and Jonathan Cohen (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 20.

³²⁷ Dan Zahavi, "Husserl's Noema and the Internalism-Externalism Debate," *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 43.

internal objects only that we are conscious of external ones.³²⁸

On the other hand, phenomenology is decidedly anti-representationalist. The idea that consciousness is a kind of box that contains representations – which in some way or another resemble the objects of the outside world – is referred to by Zahavi as the “homunculus model”.³²⁹ Already Husserl, who inaugurated the phenomenological tradition we know today, pointed out that this leads to an infinite regress. How does the subject know that his representations in fact represent the external facts? Husserl explained the issue as follows:

The ego is not a tiny man in a box that looks at the pictures and then occasionally leaves his box in order to compare the external objects with the internal ones etc. For such a picture observing ego, the picture would itself be something external; it would require its own matching internal picture, and so on ad infinitum.³³⁰

This means that representationalism does not solve the problem of how we have cognitive access to the world, but merely removes the issue with further abstractions, which requires further regressive problem-solving to remedy their explanatory emptiness (as we will see later in this chapter, the same issue arises for representationalism in respect to self-awareness).

According to Husserl, we must consider that a picture or a sign is not the object in itself. This is a problem. Representations can only refer to something else if, for example, a picture is consciously apprehended *as* a picture.³³¹ Thus the representational quality of such intermediate entities holds only because of a “special” kind of cognitive apprehension. However, such cognitive apprehension is only possible if we in fact first perceive, and only once we have done so, can our apprehension function as a sign or mediating entity. The representational quality that our “bridging” entities gain is therefore subsequent to prior

³²⁸ Dan Zahavi, “Internalism, Externalism, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Synthese* 160 (2008): 359.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 360.

³³⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana XXXVI, Transzendentaler Idealismus. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1908-1921)* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 106.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

apprehension. This is another reason to reject representational theories of perception, because they presuppose what they try to explain.³³²

From a phenomenological point of view, perception is not an encounter with intermediate entities of objects, but a confrontation with the objects themselves. For Husserl, this is the defining feature of perception: it presents us with the objects of the world in their very “bodily presence”.³³³ Thus phenomenology views the case in which something appears to us in perception as a presentation of the object given and not as an indirect, mediating representation, image, or sign of some sort that refers to something else.³³⁴ According to Thompson, intentional experiences (mental acts) should not be understood as *states that have content*, but they should be viewed as *acts that have directedness*. While the view that intentional experiences are directed acts can be reconciled with the view that intentional experiences are states that have content, it is nevertheless a worthwhile distinction to make, because it indicates a theoretical orientation that critically differs from representational theories of mind.³³⁵

The phenomenological account of intentionality is a kind of “direct perceptual realism”.³³⁶ This approach acknowledges that perception is transactional,³³⁷ that is, subject (body) and world (environment) are coupled in such a way that perceptions are not operations

³³² Dan Zahavi, “Internalism, Externalism, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Synthese* 160 (2008): 359.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 360.

³³⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana XXXVI, Transzendentaler Idealismus. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1908-1921)* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 107.

³³⁵ The difference between a phenomenological and representational approach to the mind is that phenomenologists distinguish between intentional acts of *presentation* and *re-presentation*. Perception, for example, is a mental act that is presentational, because it confronts us with the objects of the world in their very being. Memory, on other hand, is *re-presentational* because the objects remembered are not brought to our awareness in their very being. Rather, they are disclosed to us as absent (in their bodily presence) and yet at the same time are mentally evoked (not re-evoked). We reproduce and relive the past experience, but in a modified way, namely precisely *as not occurring now*. They are thus *re-presentational* and not *representational* in the sense that they would be mere signs that refer to something else. See Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 25, 288-291.

³³⁶ Dan Zahavi, “Internalism, Externalism, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Synthese* 160 (2008): 361. The enactive approach to perceptual consciousness concurs on this point. See Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 85-86.

³³⁷ Hilary Putnam, *The Threefold Cord. Mind, Body, and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 169.

performed purely in the head, but a kind of skillful cognitive activity that includes the environment.³³⁸ In this view, mental acts are not only dependent on the environment, but they are processes that are not internal in the first place; rather, they are processes that include the external environment as part and parcel of the act.³³⁹ Thus the mental acts of a subject are directed to the world and involve the world; mental acts do not have content in the sense of mediating entities between subject and environment.

4.5 *The Mind Without, the World Within*

We are now in the position to re-evaluate the internalist and externalist distinction and to consider the phenomenological position on the mind-world relation. I contend that the phenomenological mind cannot be captured by either the internalist or externalist thesis about mental content because it is too complex; rather, it transcends the analytical divide.

Therefore, the phenomenological mind defies the very internalism-externalism framework.³⁴⁰

The phenomenological view is very similar to the enactive approach in cognitive science to explain meaning and cognition.³⁴¹ According to the enactive view, “autonomous

³³⁸ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 81. See also Alva Noë and Evan Thompson, “Introduction,” in *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, eds. Alva Noë and Evan Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 5; Evan Thompson, Adrian Palacios, and Francisco J. Varela, “Ways of Coloring: Comparative Color Vision as a Case Study for Cognitive Science,” in *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, eds. Alva Noë and Evan Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 396-398; and Alva Noë and J. Kevin O’Regan, “On the Brain-Basis of Visual Consciousness: A Sensorimotor Account,” in *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, eds. Alva Noë and Evan Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 567; and Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), vii, 1-3, 72-73, 113-122.

³³⁹ Dan Zahavi, “Internalism, Externalism, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Synthese* 160 (2008): 357. Noë argues for what he calls “enactive externalism”, an account in which the vehicles of mental content actually cross the boundary of the head and reach out into the world. He says: “I have been arguing that, for at least some experiences, the physical substrate of the experience *may* cross boundaries, implicating neural, bodily, and environmental features,” thus “cognitive processes may cross the boundary of the skull [and] extend out into the world.” For further discussion of this idea that experiences are not solely “in the head” (within the context of an enactive paradigm of cognitive science) see Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 210-222.

³⁴⁰ Dan Zahavi, “The Mind Without, the World Within,” *Synthese* 160 (2008): 309.

³⁴¹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 26.

systems”³⁴² bring forth or enact meaning through interacting with their environment in a reciprocal fashion. Hence the “inner” and the “outer” are not spheres that exist independently of or prior to this process. The spheres are domains that are mutually specified through the enactive relation that exists in the structural coupling of a given system and its environment.³⁴³

In an analogous fashion, phenomenology views the mind-world relation via the correlational structure of intentionality (the noesis-noema correlation). This relation is a dyadic object-approach (presentational) instead of a triadic mediation-approach (representational).³⁴⁴ What is important about the dyadic approach is that the transcendent object (noema) is presented/given to us through the intentional activities of consciousness (noesis). This means that the object/world falls within the phenomenological domain. This domain or continuum is defined by “the structures and conditions of possibility for phenomena [which] are antecedent to any divide between psychological interiority and physical exteriority, since they are... of the dimension in which any object – be it external or internal – manifests itself.”³⁴⁵ In this way, transcendental phenomenology is defined by its will to reach out to that which cannot be enclosed by subjectivity; it extends the mind into the environment. A mental act includes both the intentional act as well as the intentional object. Therefore, that which presents itself as genuinely transcendent (it is “exterior” to subjectivity) is also phenomenologically immanent.³⁴⁶

The phenomenological mind cannot be identified with internalism, if by this we mean a kind of Cartesian materialism.³⁴⁷ In this view, the mind is identified with the brain, which is considered to be independent of the world and a self-contained organ. But this is decidedly

³⁴² Systems which are self-organizing and in “cognitive” contact with their environment, that is they have an affective and adaptive relation to that which is not enclosed within their own self-organization.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Dan Zahavi, “Husserl’s Noema and the Internalism-Externalism Debate,” *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 53.

³⁴⁵ Dan Zahavi, “Internalism, Externalism, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Synthese* 160 (2008): 372.

³⁴⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 27.

³⁴⁷ Dan Zahavi, “Husserl’s Noema and the Internalism-Externalism Debate,” *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 51.

false from a phenomenological point of view, because a mental act consists of an inseparable dyadic structure of both the intentional act as well as the intentional object. Mental acts do not have content that can be identified with subpersonal and physical entities which refer to the outside world (i.e., intermediated entities), but mental acts are directed to and in this way dependent on the objects that are phenomenologically constituted.

Consequently, we cannot make the kind of simple divide that is endorsed by the internalist/externalist debate. This division is rather artificial and problematic. Internalism requires that there is a gap between mind and world, but externalism argues to the contrary that the world is not outside of the mind. If we follow the externalist intuition to its end, we must conclude that its intuition that mind and world are inseparable entails that reference (mediation) is determined by factors internal to this whole: the phenomenological continuum of mind-world. It is therefore hard to see how this radical kind of phenomenological externalism distinguishes itself from a kind of internalism that holds reference to be solely an internal matter of the mind, a mind that is defined in a sufficiently broad sense.³⁴⁸

Thus the phenomenological mind is more complex than the internalist/externalist divide can account for. It encompasses the whole phenomenological domain of mind and world. Accordingly, we should reject the chasm between a self-contained mind and a mindless world, and we should neither conceive the subjective as inside the mind nor the objective as outside of it.³⁴⁹

From this discussion follows that the noema (the intended object) is decidedly not an internal mental representation, but the transcendent (“external”) object that is disclosed and presented to us through our first-personal perspective (“interior” subjectivity). The “correlational structure of intentionality”³⁵⁰ enables the phenomenological approach to steer

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Dan Zahavi, “Internalism, Externalism, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Synthese* 160 (2008): 370.

³⁵⁰ In this instance the correlational structure refers specifically to the coupling of a system with its environment, or the transactional nature of perception.

clear from idealism, because the phenomenological mind comprises the whole mind-and-world continuum: subjectivity is therefore self-transcending (open).

With the help of this discussion of representationalism, internalism, and externalism, as well as the phenomenological position on these issues, we are now in a good position to return to objections 4-6.

4.6 Objection 4: The Question of the Referential Powers of the Mind

The issue of objection 4 is whether first-person methods presuppose the mind to have the referential powers it has independently of the world. Are such methods solipsistic?

My first response is to point to the phenomenological analysis of intentionality, which shows that subjectivity is self-transcending, at least in most instances, especially in experiences that are perceptual and heteronomous (endogenous-perceptual, exogenous-perceptual, as well as intentionally narrow and broad).

A proper account of mental acts requires of us to consider the complete noesis-noema correlational structure. Thus the phenomenological account of intentionality shows that paying attention to our first-person perspective from a first-person point of view does not ignore our embeddedness with “existing reality”.³⁵¹ In fact, our first-personal perspective includes the external world in a very radical and broad internalist sense: one that transcends the traditional internalist/externalist divide. Therefore, when we first-personally examine phenomena, we consider the objects in themselves within the context of the phenomenological reflection.

This is a direct realist account of our access to the world. The realist view steers clear from the idea that phenomena (intended objects) are merely mental representations (mediating entities in the brain that refer to the environment) and thus independent of the

³⁵¹ Dan Zahavi, “Husserl’s Noema and the Internalism-Externalism Debate,” *Inquiry* 47 (2004): 50.

world. When we appreciate the fact that phenomenology is not a representationalist view of the mind, then we can reject the potential criticisms entailed by this question. Intentional mental acts are coupled with the subject's world.

4.7 Objection 5: Does the Epoché Exclude the External World?

According to phenomenology, the phenomenological reflection considers the objects-as-they-are-intended. Objection 5 expresses doubt about this. It asks: Does the epoché mean that we bracket the transcendent (exterior) spatio-temporal world (the “other”)? Or, does the epoché mean that we continue to investigate the transcendent (exterior) spatio-temporal world, but with a different attitude? The answer to this is that the latter is true.

After the phenomenological reduction (which includes the epoché), the first-person examination continues to attend the worldly object. The only difference here is that the phenomenon is no longer considered with our naive “natural” attitude; rather, we focus on just how the phenomenon is intentionally given to us in experience. In this way, we consider it as a correlate of our experience.³⁵² The turn from our naive way-of-being-in-the-world to a reflective exploration of our experience does not entail that we “turn away” from the world; in contrast, it is a more radical way of paying attention to the world and how it is given to us.³⁵³ Therefore, the phenomenological reflection does not exclude the world.

4.8 Objection 6: What about Idealism?

We may question contemplative traditions concerned with examining non-perceptual, autonomous kinds of experience first-personally: Do these approaches exclude the world and necessitate an internalist view of the mind? This question is difficult to answer, because there are many contemplative traditions with different metaphysical commitments; however, I contend that the concerns of this question can nevertheless be appeased.

³⁵² Ibid., 48.

³⁵³ Dan Zahavi, “Internalism, Externalism, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Synthese* 160 (2008): 361.

To respond to this question, I will first make a distinction between (i) methodological solipsism and (ii) idealism.

(i) Methodological solipsism shall denote a method that is employed to explore and account for the world by solely relying on the subject's mind conceived from an internalist point of view. In this case, the mind has referential powers independent of the world. Hence methodological solipsism relies solely on the subject's internal mind to account for the external world (because such "represents" and "refers" to the world).

(ii) Idealism denotes (a) the denial of materialistic atomism, which is a position that holds the ultimate constituents of reality to be irreducible, minute particles consisting of "physical stuff"; and (b) the affirmation that all that exists consists solely of "mind stuff": all properties are mental properties.

I will now discuss some relevant phenomenological insights that Husserl has to offer on this matter. In *Ideen I*, Husserl points out that pure consciousness is conceivable and that it should be considered an autonomous domain despite the fact that consciousness would change if the world of objects were removed. He believes that consciousness would still remain unaffected in its own existence.³⁵⁴ Husserl further claims in *Ideen I* that consciousness does not depend on an actually existing world;³⁵⁵ that it is ontologically antecedent to the world and should therefore be considered as the *Wurzel* (root) and *Quelle* (source) of all other forms of being.³⁵⁶

At a first glance these statements of Husserl's seem to be hostile to an externalist view of the phenomenological domain (the noesis-noema continuum). However, Zahavi explains that this conclusion is premature. Husserl in fact does not intend "to drive a wedge between

³⁵⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana*, Vol. 3/1-2, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie I* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1976), 104-105.

³⁵⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana XXXVI, Transzendentaler Idealismus. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1908-1921)* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 78-79.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

the world as we experience it and the real world.”³⁵⁷ This means that Husserl is not arguing that what is given to us in our phenomenology will remain untouched when the world is removed from the equation. In matter of fact, Husserl argues against such an interpretation and believes that our experiences would change were the world to disappear. What Husserl is saying, then, is that it is conceivable that “some form of consciousness might be possible even in the absence of an objective world,”³⁵⁸ but not that every type of experience can occur in the absence of the world.³⁵⁹

We need to distinguish investigating consciousness *simpliciter* from examining the external world through our internal mind only (a mind that is internalist and can refer to the world without its existence). Such a self-enclosed mind could produce any experience independent of “actual existing reality” (the world). A method that would rely solely on such an internal mind would indeed be solipsistic; however, this is decidedly not the case. It is false to infer from the possibility of experiencing states of consciousness not referring to the world that methods employed to examine such states also entail that the world can be examined without its existence and purely via the inspection of “mental representations”.

What about the issue of idealism? Idealism is a metaphysical position about the ontological status of the world and reality. There are indeed contemplative and phenomenological traditions that uphold an idealistic metaphysical framework. We just need to consider the Buddhist Yogācāra school, for example. However, this ought not to be confused with methodological issues, because the idealistic stance is a conclusion drawn, not a method employed. The methods themselves remain true to the phenomenological attitude: to bracket metaphysical (or at times any) assumptions and to attend to the phenomena themselves with a critical attitude. Therefore, it is false to argue that a first-person approach

³⁵⁷ Dan Zahavi, “Internalism, Externalism, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Synthese* 160 (2008): 361.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 362.

³⁵⁹ This view is supported by the enactive approach to perception. Noë argues that “some experiences, or some features of some experiences, are, as it were, exclusively [internal], but that full-blown, mature human experience is not.” See Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 218.

is methodologically solipsist, no matter what metaphysical conclusions might come from the examination.

4.9 Objection 7: Does Meta-awareness Undermine Our Access to Experience?

The issue of this objection is whether “meta-awareness” (reflection or monitoring) of conscious experience changes the experience in question. If this is the case, how can we study experience *as it is actually given* to us? I argue that when a first-person approach is employed to examine perceptual kinds of experience (endogenous and exogenous; intentionally broad and narrow), then the potential changes involved are trivial and do not compromise the project to study the experience in question.³⁶⁰

To understand why “meta-awareness” does not compromise examining subjectively lived-through experience, we have to first consider the nature of phenomenological reflection. From a phenomenological point of view, experiences which we subject to reflection acquire a new mode. They are attentionally modified. The modification process that reflection initiates discloses and explicates all the components and structures of experience that were prior implicit and unthematic.³⁶¹ In this way, reflection thematises our primary experience so that aspects of it originally in the background of our attention come to be explicit themes of our experience. Thus reflection discloses nonthematic and implicit lived experience.

While attention is understood to be a primary act of our experience, reflection is viewed as a new, higher-order act of attention. Reflection changes the mode of a given experience from a nonthematic to a thematic mode of givenness.³⁶² It alters the mode of the primary act. If first-person approaches are understood as second-order observational acts

³⁶⁰ This does not hold true for non-perceptual kinds of experiences, however. I will attend to this issue in Chapter 6.

³⁶¹ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 186-187.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 187.

(acts of “meta-awareness”), then the question is whether this change is too big for the primary act of experience to be adequately examined by reflection or introspection.

To address this question, I will distinguish between the quality and matter of intentionality. Recall that intentional experiences (mental acts) have a dyadic act/object correlational structure, which consist of an intentional act and an intentional object. This correlational structure is of service to us, because intentional experiences have two inseparable but distinguishable aspects (or “moments”): they consist of an intentional quality and an intentional matter.³⁶³

The intentional quality of a mental act defines the type of experience it is. For example, we distinguish between wishing, desiring, recalling, rejecting, fantasising, doubting, regretting, disapproving, loving, etc. We might doubt “the suitability of some advice we received”, or we might disapprove of “a volatile action of our neighbour”, or we can regret “a decision we made ten years ago”, or we feel love towards “the presence of God”. According to Husserl, these are cognitive differences, and these also amount to *experiential* differences. This means that different intentional qualities have different corresponding phenomenologies.³⁶⁴

The intentional matter of a mental act defines what an experience is about.³⁶⁵ It is what the experience is directed at. The experience is about something, be it a sculpture, a landscape, a dog, or some object of worship. A change in intentional matter will correspond to a change of how it is for us to undergo the experience. Additionally, the intentional matter (object) of an experience can be given to a subject’s awareness through different modes. This fact holds for ordinary external objects of the physical world as well as categorical objects, or

³⁶³ Gallagher and Zahavi discuss this issue of syntax in Sartre’s work in greater detail. See Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 115.

³⁶⁴ Dan Zahavi, “Intentionality and Phenomenality: A Phenomenological Take on the Hard Problem,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, Research Library (2003): 68.

³⁶⁵ Gallagher and Zahavi discuss this issue of syntax in Sartre’s work in greater detail. See Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 115.

even religious or mystical objects.³⁶⁶ In this way, we can be repelled by the “Presence of God” or intensively attracted to it, depending on the intentional quality or mode of presentation.

If we distinguish between the quality and matter of an intentional experience, then we can appreciate that a change in the mode of presentation – while it will make an experiential difference – will not change what the experience is about. It does not change the content of the mental act itself.³⁶⁷

When we consider contemplative states of consciousness, or even mystical experiences, then it is especially relevant that the content of an experience does not change when its intentional quality changes. For example, God may be presented to a subject’s awareness in different and very specific modes that have different phenomenologies.³⁶⁸ While these differences in phenomenological quality denote cognitive and experiential differences, they do not imply that the experiences are necessarily about different objects. Therefore, experiences may be phenomenologically mediated by different intentional qualities, but this does not imply that the experiences are completely mediated by representational bridging entities, or that they may be completely constructed and thus (i) not about the same object/matter and (ii) merely about imaginary internal mental representations without reference to any “actually existing reality”.³⁶⁹ From this follows that even if various

³⁶⁶ Dan Zahavi, “Intentionality and Phenomenality: A Phenomenological Take on the Hard Problem,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, Research Library (2003): 69.

³⁶⁷ A similar distinction made in Buddhist philosophy that can be traced back to Dharmakīrti is discussed by Paul Williams. He says: “the argument is that when we see for example an attractive object we not only see the object but also feel happy. This happiness is a dimension of subjective response. When I have happiness at seeing x, that happiness is... not x as such.” See Paul Williams, *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998), 105.

³⁶⁸ William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 23, 40-41.

³⁶⁹ I wish to point out for the interested reader that this exposition is also implicitly a counter-argument to the constructivist thesis about the epistemic status and phenomenological nature of mystical states of consciousness (“MSC”). Constructivism is the view that all human experience is without exception mediated, including lived religious realities of all sorts, and that therefore MSCs have no shared common core and are not immediate encounters with one and the same object. In other words, MSCs have of no cognitive value and are merely mental constructions mediated by internal and worldless (imaginary) “representations”. Note that my anti-representationalist discussion on phenomenological intentionality also stands as a criticism of the strong

(mystical) experiences are accompanied by differing affective qualities, it does not follow that these differences in intentional qualities entail a difference in intentional matter (object). Therefore, veridical perceptions can be “qualified” by different subjective phenomenologies.³⁷⁰

What are the implications for the phenomenological method of reflection? As Zahavi astutely argues, “reflection alters the mode in which the primary act is experienced, it does *not* change the content of the act.”³⁷¹ Consequently, the kind of change that reflection introduces is in the mode of presentation, not in the intentional matter. Furthermore, the kind of reflection involved is best described to accentuate the structures already inherent of the experiences in question: it should not be held to be a process that adds new components, structures, or content.³⁷² It discloses its theme, it does not produce it.³⁷³ The change involved is an attentional modification that discloses implicit and nonthematic aspects of experience that can be attended to with heightened awareness and sensitivity. I conclude that the changes involved when we phenomenologically reflect on experience (“meta-awareness”) do not compromise the project to examine experience *as it is given*.³⁷⁴

“mediation” focus of the constructivist view. Furthermore, my direct realist treatment of intentional experience, alongside Alston’s “Theory of Appearing” (perception is presentational and experiences of God share an analogous structure to as well as the direct-presentational quality of sense perception), also stands opposed to constructivist mediation theories of mind. Most representative of this position is Steven T. Katz, Jerry H. Gill, Wayne Proudfoot, and Larry Short, et al. For a thorough treatment and refutation of Constructivism see also Forman’s work. For a concise overview of this see Robert K. C. Forman, “Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting,” in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3-49; and Robert K. C. Forman, “Introduction: Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity, and the Perennial Philosophy,” in *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4-41.

³⁷⁰ Alston further points out that “even if the whole phenomenal content of the experience of God were affective, I would not take that to rule out the possibility of veridical perception of God.” See William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 50.

³⁷¹ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 187.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁷³ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 62.

³⁷⁴ Resistance to a science of mind that incorporates introspection as a method has come from this doubt about the transforming quality that our observation has on mental phenomena. Our very act of observing them might alter them. Wallace offers an interesting counter-argument to this when he points out that Quantum physicists have already taken note of the impact the participating observer has in examining quantum processes. Niels

To review my treatment of scepticism so far, I have responded to seven sceptical objections to first-person methods. I showed that the phenomenological and contemplative methods I presented in Chapter 3 cannot be equated with the classic understanding of introspection (objection 1). Therefore, the methods I have considered are not part of a failed project. To the contrary, I showed that it is possible to phenomenologically attend to the intentional domain of consciousness (objection 2), and that this act is decidedly not unreliable as a method to describe lived-through experience (objection 3).

Next, I reviewed representationalism to clear the way for a phenomenological view of the mind, and to set the stage to respond to objections 4, 5, and 6. I discussed the mind-world relation to show that the phenomenological method is not solipsistic, because subjectivity is embedded with existing reality (objection 4). I concluded that the epoché does not exclude the world, but attends to it with a more radical, phenomenological attitude (objection 5).

I then approached the problem of idealism. To respond to this challenge, I distinguished (i) methodological solipsism from (ii) idealism. To this end, I delved further into the implications a “pure” (worldless) form of consciousness would have for first-person methods. This discussion demonstrated that the existence of a pure form of consciousness would not negate an externalist view of the mind. I argued that this conclusion enables us to affirm the existence of a pure, worldless form of consciousness, as well as our ability to first-personally examine it, without falling prey to methodological solipsism or metaphysical idealism.

Finally, I responded to objection 7 by showing that even if meta-awareness alters intentional experience, this does not pose an issue for us to examine lived-through intentional

Bohr and others have also recognised the parallel that exists in this respect to the observation of mental phenomena. Thus, the problem that the observer invariably alters the observed processes is no news in modern physics, and this fact has not prevented quantum physics from “becoming the most successful physical theory in the history of science.” Now, if this observer participation problem is no reason for us to reject the physical sciences, why should this be reason for us to reject the possibility of a science of mind based on the observation of mental phenomena? For a longer discussion of this see B. Alan Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 37-43.

experiences and their intentional matters. Thus, in the case of intentional experience (only), the impact of observation does not compromise the project of studying conscious experience from a first-person point of view.

In my next chapter, I will continue to address the issue that acts of observation impact what is observed; however, I will do so with a focus on the self-aware ego-pole of consciousness, rather than its intentional object-pole. This is the challenge of objection 8.

Chapter 5

Self-Awareness: First-Person Methodologies and the Theory of Disclosing

So far as I can see, this [philosophers' difficulty in conceiving of cognitive states whose content are unlike that of sense perception] simply evinces a lack of speculative imagination. Why suppose that the possibilities of experiential givenness, for human beings or otherwise, are exhausted by the powers of *our* five [intentional] senses?³⁷⁵

William Alston

We are now left with question eight: Can phenomenological reflection reveal the pre-reflective structure of self-awareness?

As I pointed out earlier, the actual issue of first-person methods is not the mental/physical divide, but whether such methods can examine perceptual experiences (internal or external), which have a subject-object structure without changing the experiences too much; and how such methods can attend to non-perceptual kinds of experience, which do not display a subject-object structure, also without changing their structure.

This chapter is dedicated to answering this question by putting forward the “Theory of Disclosing” as an account of cognitive access.

I offer the following strategy to approach this task: First, I will offer some final reasons to reject representational theories of mind which will (i) make us aware of how problematic the issue of reflection really is and (ii) show how we should conceive the capacity of consciousness to be self-aware.

Second, I will re-visit both reflection and self-awareness. I will discuss how Sartre distinguishes between two different kinds of reflection and re-define what the notion “cognitive access” intends to capture.

³⁷⁵ William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 17.

Finally, I will introduce the “Theory of Disclosing” as an account of cognitive access, so that we can expand the list of “observable experiences” and make room for non-perceptual types of experience. I will argue that we do have cognitive access to non-perceptual experiences, continental phenomenology notwithstanding.

5.1 A Final Critique of Representational Theories of Mind

I will now give some final reasons for rejecting representationalism.³⁷⁶ This will serve our understanding of reflection and self-awareness for the proceeding discussion.

Representationalism is a theory of mind. When we think of the requirements for such a theory of consciousness then it

has to account for the first-personal or egocentric givenness of our conscious states, and has to respect the difference between our consciousness of a foreign object, and our consciousness of our own subjectivity. Any convincing theory of consciousness has to be able to explain the distinction between intentionality, which is characterized by a *difference* between the subject and the object of experience, and self-consciousness, which implies some form of *identity*.³⁷⁷

In the last three decades, the most prominent way to account for self-awareness (our consciousness of our own subjectivity) in both cognitive science and analytic philosophy of mind is via “higher-order representation theories” of mind, which account for self-awareness in terms of intentionality.³⁷⁸ To explicate this, I will first distinguish between two ways of speaking about an experience being conscious, and then utilise this distinction to explain what higher-order theories of self-awareness exactly are. Finally, I will show that such accounts of self-awareness are impoverished.

There are two different ways of speaking about an experience being “conscious”:³⁷⁹ (i)

³⁷⁶ I already offered some reasons for rejecting representationalism in Chapter 4, where I discussed it in the context of the phenomenological concept of intentionality, as a kind of direct perceptual realism, and the internalist/externalist distinction.

³⁷⁷ Dan Zahavi, “First-Person Thoughts and Embodied Self-awareness: Some Reflections on the Relation Between Recent Analytical Philosophy and Phenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002): 16.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 13.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. See also Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 52.

we can speak of experience being conscious *of* things; and (ii) we can speak of an experience being conscious *simpliciter*. The former is a transitive structure of consciousness and the latter an intransitive one that refers to phenomenal consciousness in the sense of what it is like to live through a certain experience (e.g., state-awareness).

According to higher-order theories, self-awareness (intransitive consciousness) is relational.³⁸⁰ This means that a mental state is transitively conscious due to a (higher) second-order representation about that state; this can be a higher-order thought or a higher-order perception.³⁸¹ This means that when we speak about a mental state being intransitively conscious (*simpliciter*), what we mean to say is that we are simply transitively conscious of it.³⁸² Phenomenal consciousness is therefore conferred by object-directed conscious states (intentional mental acts).³⁸³

Gallagher and Zahavi compare this way of thinking about consciousness to a spotlight that illuminates mental states; mental states which are not illuminated by a higher-representation operate in the dark.³⁸⁴ Illumination in this context is the “conscious-making” feature of “meta-mental states”. Thus mental states become conscious states because higher-order states (meta-mental states) take them as their objects. Gallagher and Zahavi summarise

³⁸⁰ Rosenthal states: “Explaining intransitive in terms of transitive consciousness squares reasonably well with our pretheoretic intuitions about what it is for a mental state to be conscious. Plainly, if a state is a conscious state, we are transitively conscious of it.” See David M. Rosenthal, “A Theory of Consciousness,” in *The Nature of Consciousness*, eds. N. Block, O. Flanagan and G. Güzeldere (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 737.

³⁸¹ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 52. For a representative view of higher-order thought (representational structures) see David M. Rosenthal, “Varieties of higher-order theories,” in *Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness: An Anthology*, ed. Rocco J. Gennaro (Amsterdam: John Benjamins B. V., 2004), 17-43. For a representative discussion of higher-order perception (HOP) see William Lycon, “Consciousness as Internal Monitoring,” in *The Nature of Consciousness*, eds. N. Block, O. Flanagan and G. Güzeldere (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 755-771. For a discussion of higher-order theories (both HOT and HOP) in the context of Buddhist philosophical discourse on self-cognition or reflexive awareness (*svasamvedana*) as the condition for mental states to be conscious see Zhihua Yao, *The Buddhist Theory of Self-Cognition* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 156-160.

³⁸² David M. Rosenthal, “A Theory of Consciousness,” in *The Nature of Consciousness*, eds. N. Block, O. Flanagan and G. Güzeldere (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 739.

³⁸³ Dan Zahavi, “First-Person Thoughts and Embodied Self-awareness: Some Reflections on the Relation Between Recent Analytical Philosophy and Phenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002): 15.

³⁸⁴ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 52.

this basic formula of higher-order theories as the idea that “a conscious state is a state we are conscious of.”³⁸⁵

According to Carruthers, who is a proponent of such higher-order representations, beings that do not have the cognitive capacities for such higher-order states are not phenomenally conscious.³⁸⁶ Consequently, animals and young children have no phenomenal interiority and subjectivity. This also means that they are unaware of the existence of any kind of experiencing: they lack the feature of “what it is like” to feel and live through experience.

If this is not in itself a sufficient case of *reductio ad absurdum*, then I will discuss three further problems for higher-order representational theories of mind.

First, representational theories of mind are associated with the transparency thesis of awareness. Thompson defines this thesis as follows: “We are not aware of (intrinsic mental features of) our experience, but only of the objects and properties presented by experience.”³⁸⁷ For this reason, the conscious-making feature must be another additional awareness that takes a given mental state as its object – experience is not conscious *simpliciter*.

The problem with this thesis is that it does not take into account a fundamental aspect of our subjectivity, namely its first-personal mode of givenness, that is, that there is something it is like to live through experience.³⁸⁸ We do not only hear the notes of the melody, but we also live through our listening of it. In Thompson’s own words, the “transparency of awareness thesis neglects precisely the prereflective self-consciousness of

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ P. Carruthers, “Natural Theories of Consciousness,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 6:2 (1998): 216. 203-222

³⁸⁷ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 284.

³⁸⁸ Dan Zahavi, “Phenomenal Consciousness and Self-awareness: A Phenomenological Critique of Representational Theory,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 5-6 (1998): 692-698.

subjective experience.”³⁸⁹ This critique is a phenomenological one.³⁹⁰ It recognises our capacity to be state-aware (as in the case of lucid dreaming). State-awareness implies that there is something it is like, in very distinct sense, to undergo experience, and that this can be thematised. The fact that we can become conscious of it in this thematic way implies a prior unthematic (pre-reflective) acquaintance with it.³⁹¹

The second critique is a logical one. If mental states are conscious because they are taken as objects by (higher) second-order mental states, then the (higher) second-order state needs a further (higher) third-order state for itself to be conscious – for it is only object-directed intentionality which can confer consciousness onto a lower-level state, that is, our being conscious of a state is the conscious-making feature of that state. This leads to an infinite regress. Now the typical response of higher-order proponents has been to “bite the bullet” and stop the regress at the third-order state.

This leads to the third problem for higher-order representation theories, which is both logical and intuitive. Typically, representationalists will halt the regress by accepting the existence of a dead end, that is, non-conscious mental states.³⁹² The second-order state, then, is conscious by virtue of it being the object of a non-conscious third-order perception or thought.

The problem in accepting this kind of a dead end is explanatory vacuity.³⁹³ First of all, it does not logically follow that a given mental state is conscious because of it being the object of a non-conscious mental state. To the contrary, we might wish to ask just how an unconscious process can transform another unconscious process in to a conscious one? This

³⁸⁹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 286.

³⁹⁰ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 52-53.

³⁹¹ Dan Zahavi, “First-Person Thoughts and Embodied Self-awareness: Some Reflections on the Relation Between Recent Analytical Philosophy and Phenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002): 16.

³⁹² Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 55.

³⁹³ Ibid.

is highly unconvincing and counter-intuitive. Zahavi raises the same question from a phenomenological point of view: “How can the fact of being the intentional object of an unconscious second-order state confer first-personal givenness or ‘mineness’ on an otherwise unconscious first-order mental state?”³⁹⁴ The problem we encounter here is logically analogous to the hard problem of consciousness, and has resulted in the rejection of positions that offer empty explanations, circularity, or simple denial of empirical facts (e.g., that we in fact consciously *experience*).³⁹⁵

The “hard problem” can be phrased as the following question: How does dead matter give rise to conscious experience? In this context we can ask the same question about higher-order theories: How does a “dead mental state”³⁹⁶ give rise to a conscious mental state? In response, higher-order representation theories have three options, all of which are either logical or intuitive defeaters, or both: (i) to accept an infinite regress of higher-order states; (ii) to accept the dead end of explanatory vacuity, as well as the counterintuitive notion that unconscious processes magically give rise to conscious experience; or (iii) to admit that the higher-order state is itself already implicitly conscious (which is circular, and also contradicts the very notion of a “higher-order”, because this requires of phenomenal consciousness that it be produced when a higher-order state transitively takes a separate lower-order state as its object).³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ Dan Zahavi, “First-Person Thoughts and Embodied Self-awareness: Some Reflections on the Relation Between Recent Analytical Philosophy and Phenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002): 15.

³⁹⁵ David J. Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The Hard Problem*, ed. Jonathan Shear, 9-30 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 15-16; and David J. Chalmers, “Moving Forward on the Problem of Consciousness,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The Hard Problem*, ed. Jonathan Shear, 379-422 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 380-387. See also Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 303-311.

³⁹⁶ In this context the term “dead” serves to qualify things or conditions that have no phenomenality. It thus contrasts with the notions “alive” or “lived”, because these terms are used in this thesis to qualify phenomenally lived-through realities that are accompanied by conscious experience. A “dead mental state”, then, is one that does not reach the threshold of awareness; it is not consciously experienced.

³⁹⁷ The subject-object structure of this process entails that the lower-order state is *not* conscious in and of itself. See Dan Zahavi, “First-Person Thoughts and Embodied Self-Awareness: Some Reflections on the Relation

I conclude that representational theories of mind are flawed, and that it be best we reject them. This opens the gates for a phenomenological analysis of consciousness within the context of my own “Theory of Disclosing”, an account of experience that is *presentational* rather than representational.³⁹⁸

As I have just shown, we cannot conceive the *conscious-making feature* of self-awareness to be the intentionality of consciousness, because we encounter an infinite regress. For this reason, it is important to clarify how a presentational theory can work in respect to self-awareness. The problem, then, is how we can access consciousness *simpliciter*, without relying on intentional, reflective acts. Recall that self-awareness is the *conscious-making feature*, not because it is reflected upon by a higher-order (intentional) state, but intrinsically. How, then, can we access this domain? To answer this question, we must explore in more detail the relationship between reflection and self-awareness, and clarify what we mean by “cognitive access”.

5.2 Reflection and Self-awareness

We have already paid attention to pre-reflective self-awareness as an unthematic and inbuilt feature of intentional mental acts (perceptual kinds of experience). We have also clarified that it is this (intransitive) self-aware capacity of consciousness that confers phenomenal consciousness on our mental life: it is our *conscious-making feature*. Finally, we have discussed how continental phenomenologists insist that this self-awareness cannot exist without intentional mental acts, but that it pervades all of them as an invariant structure of experience. Continental phenomenologists thus conclude that subjectivity is open and that it is intentionally broad – in this specific sense (i.e., open to the world and the Other).

So what about non-perceptual kinds of experience (which are self-enclosed and without

between Recent Analytical Philosophy and Phenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002): 16.

³⁹⁸ I discuss this approach in more detail in the section on “Self-awareness and First-person Methodologies” in this Chapter.

subject-object structure)? In my final chapter, I will discuss in more detail just such an experience, but for my current purposes I want to isolate self-awareness for heuristic purposes, so that we can talk about such experiences coherently. What do I mean by this?

It is a vital question for phenomenology whether or not we can examine the pre-reflective domain of consciousness, in other words, whether or not we can gain knowledge of our conscious life.³⁹⁹ This is relevant whether or not we consider self-awareness to be dependent on intentional acts. Thus, even if self-awareness is necessarily open (in the sense that it requires intentional acts, but is itself non-intentional), the question remains whether or not we can *thematise* this pre-reflective self-awareness, which is – and remains – an implicit, pre-reflective, unthematic, and intransitive phenomenon. For purposes of this kind of discussion, then, I will treat pre-reflective self-awareness *simpliciter* – rendering the issue of whether or not self-awareness is dependent on intentionality for its occurrence as secondary. Heuristically, then, self-awareness shall be a phenomenon in itself (non-perceptual).

We can distinguish between two forms of self-awareness: pre-reflective and reflective. The former is implicit, non-relational, non-objectifying, and an immediate form of self-acquaintance. The latter is explicit, relational, and a kind of objectifying awareness that makes the unthematic, pre-reflective awareness its attentional theme.⁴⁰⁰ This kind of reflective self-awareness is best described as an intensified self-awareness, one that is accentuated through reflection.⁴⁰¹

This notion of reflection is important because in Husserl's eyes it denotes a kind of "internal perception",⁴⁰² and it is only through such reflection that we can know of our own

³⁹⁹ Dan Zahavi, "Inner Time-consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness," in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 162.

⁴⁰⁰ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 62; and Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 33.

⁴⁰¹ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 62-63.

⁴⁰² Dan Zahavi, "Inner Time-consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness," in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 162.

subjectivity. “Perception”, in this context, is a kind of *thematic examination*, one that can yield knowledge, rather than mere awareness. According to Husserl, lived-experiencing is always conscious, but this does not entail that it is thematically experienced and known. In this way, he affirms that such a thing as tacit self-awareness is a part of phenomenal life, but he denies that this kind of self-awareness yields conceptual knowledge of our own subjectivity.⁴⁰³ Reflection is therefore methodologically important for Husserl, because, in his view, it gives us the relevant *cognitive access* to yield knowledge of our lived-experience, because it is *thematic*.

While reflection discloses and thematises experience, we run into problems to disclose or thematise pre-reflective self-awareness via reflection, because for something to be thematically disclosed it must already be present, even if it is present unthematically. Hence for self-awareness to encounter itself, it needs prior acquaintance with itself (it is conscious *simpliciter*).⁴⁰⁴ Thus reflection seems unable to thematically access the domain that is *pre-reflective*. To explain this differently, if we wish to examine pre-reflective self-awareness, we have to attend to it; however, such attending implies objectivation. Consequently, our innermost subjectivity “will always evade our theoretical gaze and remain inaccessible for direct description and investigation.”⁴⁰⁵ Does Sartre’s insight that “to know is to make oneself other”⁴⁰⁶ indicate that the process of reflection must falsify the subject matter of pre-reflective self-awareness? Does this deny us cognitive access to “lived consciousness”?⁴⁰⁷

I do not think so. Let us first consider Sartre’s distinction between pure and impure reflection. Sartre will identify the notion of reflection we have been talking about so far as impure reflection. Such reflection operates with an epistemic duality. The duality arises from

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 18-19.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁰⁶ I interpret Sartre to mean that knowledge requires an epistemic duality, where that which is known is separated from the knower. Thus, I take the statement “to know is to make oneself other” to mean that we can only speak of an object or a “knowable” if we set ourselves apart from it (we “other ourselves from it”).

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 131, 181-182.

a process of objectivation. Two things come from this objectifying process, however: (i) the epistemic duality makes it a type of knowledge; and (ii) it gives rise to the salient subjective-pole of consciousness, that is, the ego.⁴⁰⁸

In contrast, pure reflection thematises the reflected in an unadulterated and unfalsified manner: “Reflected consciousness does not appear as an object and is not given perspectively as a transcendent entity existing outside reflecting consciousness.”⁴⁰⁹ Thus, according to Sartre, the given is of “absolute proximity” and “its knowledge is a totality”. There is a sense of immediacy and intimacy about this acquaintance. However, Sartre also believes that pure reflection does not yield any novel discoveries, that is, we do not learn anything new through such reflection, because all it can do is disclose and thematise that which is already (implicitly) present: the absolute flow of pre-reflective self-awareness. This lack of new insight leads Sartre to suggest that we should not call it knowledge, but employ the term “*recognition*” to capture this kind of direct, immediate, non-objectifying, and non-conceptual self-acquaintance.⁴¹⁰

I shall not quarrel with Sartre’s choice of terms, because, for our phenomenological purposes, all we need is *some kind of cognitive access* to pre-reflective self-awareness, which is a matter of *thematic examination*. In sum: Cognitive access is for our purposes *a subject’s thematically lived-through acquaintance with a given state or state of affairs that is disclosed to him with “first-person phenomenality”*⁴¹¹. On this point, my position is the same as that of Sartre and Husserl.

How does this play out in respect to pre-reflective self-awareness? Zahavi believes that Sartre’s distinction is very important, because it is indeed one thing to be self-aware, but it is also quite a different thing to come to a “philosophical comprehension” of self-aware

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ By “first-person phenomenality” I mean that it is something it is like to consciously live through such acquaintance. This does not have to be perspectival or positional, but simply an actual, phenomenal occurrence.

subjectivity.⁴¹² For Zahavi, a theoretical perspective necessarily implies the objectivation (falsification) of the desideratum. Thus it is not conceivable to him that we can come to a philosophical understanding of subjectivity through pure reflection, even though he is willing to acknowledge that pure reflection remains a possibility for phenomenological investigation (practically speaking). This scepticism leads Zahavi to question Sartre's idea of pure reflection, which seems ad hoc to him: first, it turns out that pure reflection is the only "type of reflection" that can disclose consciousness; and second, Sartre never clarifies how such reflection is possible.⁴¹³

Zahavi's confrontation with the problem of reflection prompts him to raise the question whether there may be a major problem or dead end for phenomenology.⁴¹⁴ For Zahavi, the pressing question that needs to be answered is "whether phenomenology can offer any alternative ways to illuminate the field?"⁴¹⁵ In his view there is, but this pathway is theoretical and leads away from an empirical approach to self-awareness. He dispenses with an empirical approach because he believes it would result in us developing a "*phenomenology of the invisible*".⁴¹⁶

I do not share Zahavi's view on this. I argue that an empirical approach is possible. This is so because I contend our innermost subjectivity to belong to experiences of the "observable" kind. I will now make this idea sensible by explicating my "Theory of Disclosing".

⁴¹² Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 182.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 190.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 191.

⁴¹⁶ His theoretic approach is to establish an analogy to the problem of intersubjectivity and the inaccessibility of the Other. In this way, the radically subjective and the radically transcendent are both inaccessible to us. Since the inaccessibility of the Other is not considered a fault, we should not consider the inaccessibility of our own subjectivity to a fault either. He concludes that this "unthematizability" is not a deficiency in need of remedy, but due to the fact that both radical subjectivity and radical alterity belong to different ontological dimensions than that of our vision. See Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 191-194.

5.3 A Response to Objection 8: Observable Experiences and the Theory of Disclosing

Alston put forward a “Theory of Appearing” as an account of perception.⁴¹⁷ His focus is on *direct* experiences that fall under the rubric of “experience”, because they involve a *presentation* or *appearance* of something to the subject. The basic idea of his “Theory of Appearing” is that perception is an “awareness of something’s appearing to one as such-and-such”.⁴¹⁸ This denotes a perceptual kind of experience that is analogous to sensory perception, because the object “comes to” the subject and presents itself as existing independently from him, in other words, the object transcends the bounds of the subject: it is an encounter with the Other.

It is important to consider that subjects of experience can discern the states of consciousness that accompany their experiences from the object that is presented to them (recall the case of lucid dreaming). Thus experiences have an identifiable phenomenological quality that is distinguishable from their content. This is analogous to the phenomenological distinction between intentional quality and intentional content. These can be referred to by the subject as subjective features that accompany given states, such as: the sense of joy and calm, or sorrow and regret, etc.⁴¹⁹

If we distinguish between the modes of consciousness and the objects (content) present in the experiences, it helps us to understand more clearly non-perceptual kinds of experience. The mode of access to such experiences is absolutely immediate, which I briefly paid attention to when I outlined the difference between perceptual and non-perceptual kinds of experience. Let us recall Alston’s case of “extreme experiences”. In such kinds of experience we cannot distinguish the mode of consciousness from the object of awareness. In fact, the “object” of awareness *is nothing other* than the phenomenal quality of the lived-through non-

⁴¹⁷ William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 5.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 23.

dual and self-enclosed subjective condition. However, such a condition should not be held to isolate the subjective pole unto itself, but to embrace both the subjective and objective pole into an undifferentiated unity or “allness” – an inclusive totality, as Sartre would say.

Unfortunately, Alston’s breathtakingly simple “Theory of Appearing” is intended to account for no more than perceptual kinds of experience. This leaves out non-perceptual types of experience. Thus Alston’s theory will not suffice for our purposes, and we need to consider theories that have greater explanatory power. Consequently, I will extend his theory to include non-perceptual types of experience.

Alston puts forward, for the purposes of his own inquiry, a paradigm case of contemplative states that goes as follows: the state is something that has been *presented* or *given to* the consciousness of a subject “in generically the same way as that in which objects in the environment are (apparently) *presented* to [a subject’s] consciousness in sense perception”.⁴²⁰ He believes that contemplative states can be regarded as a mode of perception, from a phenomenological point of view. However, the non-perceptual type of experience is different:⁴²¹ it is a reality or states of affair otherwise not accessible to our normal mode of experiencing which is *disclosed within* the self-enclosed subjectivity itself. What is disclosed embraces the total subject-object continuum non-dually, intransitively, non-objectively, and yet in a *thematic* manner also, unlike sense perception. This harmonises with Yandell’s astute pointer that there are also experiences that have a subject/aspect structure in which the subject *discovers* or *discerns* something that is contained within the self-enclosed subjectivity of the aware condition/totality.⁴²² Perceptual and non-perceptual types of experience have in common the fact that they are both *thematic*, and this is our

⁴²⁰ William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 39; see also p. 55 for his “naïve realist” concept of perception.

⁴²¹ Jerome Gellman, “Mysticism [1. Mystical Experience],” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mysticism/> (Accessed 6 October 2009); and Jerome Gellman, *Mystical Experience of God: A Philosophical Inquiry*, Ashgate Philosophy of Religion Series (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001), 4.

⁴²² Keith E. Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 19.

cognitive access point to lived-through experience.

Because non-perceptual types of experience do not contain any subject-object polarity (the content of the experience is not objectivised or encountered as the Other in any shape or form), we need to qualify the terms “of” and “to” that are used in conjunction with the terms “experience”, “encounter”, “acquaintance”, “disclosure”, and so forth. Through qualifying the terms we can make room for the “Theory of Disclosing” which incorporates within itself the “Theory of Appearing” in such a way that the notion of “appearance” is not limited to a dualistic, transitive, subject-object structure derived from exclusively perceptual models of experience.

Sartre believed that we are aware of our experiences before we reflect on them, and that we also have an awareness of self (ourselves) that is prior to us paying any explicit attention to it. In French, however, the term for self-awareness is *conscience de soi*, which translates literally as “consciousness of self”. This phrase suggest that consciousness objectivises itself; that it is an instance of *self-othering* in which consciousness takes an object and “artificially” creates a subject-object structure to thematically attend to itself. But phenomenologists such as Sartre, Shear, Forman, Gallagher, and Zahavi stress that this *seeming* implication is due to necessity of syntax only.⁴²³ Because it is difficult to avoid the “of”, Sartre qualified it with parentheses to negate its misleading implications.⁴²⁴ I shall follow his example to the extent that I will cancel out the dualistic connotation of “of”. Thus the “Theory of Disclosing” requires of us to tacitly qualify “of” such that we understand lived-through experiences in which phenomena appear “to” our awareness, or are *disclosed*

⁴²³ Gallagher and Zahavi discuss this issue of syntax in Sartre’s work in greater detail. See Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 62. Shear and Forman also concur. Forman actually draws on Sartre’s work heavily to justify the cognitive status of non-dual, non-perceptual, non-intentional kinds of experiences such as the “Pure Consciousness Event” which, as Shear discussed in an important footnote, is consciously described as an “event” rather than an “experience of” to avoid the dualistic implication of the term “of.” See Jonathan Shear, “Closing the Empirical Gap,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The “Hard Problem”*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 373, fn. 14.

⁴²⁴ J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library), liv.

and *presented* “to” us, in such a way that their phenomenological structure is not confined to the operative subject-object duality of perceptual experience. Realities and states of affairs may be disclosed or presented *within* the self-enclosed subjective (but not necessarily internally isolated) condition that we live through experientially.

To clarify Alston’s “Theory of Appearing”, as extended in my “Theory of Disclosing”, we can distinguish between four grades of immediacy: (1) Absolute immediacy that intransitively but thematically discloses X to the subject, where the content X *is* the phenomenal quality of his own subjectivity. This means that the subjective condition of acquaintance is a non-dual, non-objectivised, and self-enclosed lived subjectivity. (2) Direct immediacy, in which the subject is transitively aware of X through a subject-object structure, but not with the help of anything else. (3) Mediated immediacy, which is a form of direct perception. In this kind, the subject is aware of X with the help of a state of consciousness that is itself not perceived, but could be thematically attended to in a transitive fashion (i.e., objectivised, establishing a subject-object structure). If this state of consciousness is attended to, then it is an instance of direct immediacy. (4) Mediated perception, in which the subject is aware of X through his perceiving of another object.

According to Alston’s “Theory of Appearing”, a subject is aware of X via the help of a state of consciousness that is itself not perceived (the intentional act of which we are pre-reflectively self-aware, that is, we live through it implicitly), but can be thematically attended to in a transitive fashion (through objectivation only). This is the third kind of immediacy described above.⁴²⁵

My “Theory of Disclosing”, however, also includes the first kind of immediacy: a subject may *also* be aware “of” X immediately and intransitively, where X *is* the lived phenomenal domain of his own subjectivity. This means that the subjective condition of

⁴²⁵ William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 21-22.

acquaintance is a *non-dual*, non-objectivised, and self-enclosed lived-through subjectivity, along the lines of Sartre's pure reflection. To make this idea meaningful, the notion "of" is qualified such that our phenomenal life is not confined to subject-object dualities.

We may now wish to ask: How is such "pure disclosure" possible? The key to such disclosure is the ability to *thematise* pre-reflective self-awareness *without* (impure) reflection or *self-othering* (fissuring) consciousness. It is a way to become acquainted with one's own subjectivity without objectifying it. This is an approach to examining self-awareness that resembles Sartre's *pure reflection*. Unfortunately, Sartre did not explain his notion of *pure reflection* deeply enough to ground his philosophical work. I intend to remedy this. Since this issue is an empirical one,⁴²⁶ I will pick up on the current trend in neurophenomenology to draw on the robust, empirical proficiency of contemplative phenomenology, in an attempt to compensate for the continental tradition, which has weighted philosophical analysis over practical expertise.⁴²⁷

Contemplative practitioners are trained to (i) stabilise attention; (2) unlearn habitual cognitive modes of functioning; and (3) settle the mind in its "natural state".⁴²⁸ Such training includes the ability to disengage from mental processes that proliferate objectified content.⁴²⁹ How, then, can those steps thematise self-awareness without objectifying it? First,

⁴²⁶ Dunne discusses the empirical status of the reflexivity of consciousness. He also discusses empirical claims surrounding such coming from some strands of Buddhist philosophy. Dunne points out that "one can induce a state in which the sole 'content' is reflexive awareness". One can be trained, therefore, to enter a state in which there is not subject-object duality, and all that remains, according to Dunne, is *reflexivity* (of awareness). The claim is that such a state can be experienced, and Dunne suggests that this might be a tractable claim. See John Dunne, "Buddhist epistemology and the ways in which it might help inform western conceptions of mind and consciousness (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008)." <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6115189118596625142&hl=en&emb=1#docid=-5575974425081410604> (accessed August 26, 2010).

⁴²⁷ See Chapter 3. See also Evan Thompson, "Neurophenomenology and Contemplative Experience," in *The Oxford Handbook of Science and Religion*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 228-221.

⁴²⁸ B. Alan Wallace, *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* [Chapter 7. *Śamatha: The Contemplative Refinement of Attention*] (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 142-148.

⁴²⁹ Robert K. C. Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*, State University of New York Press, 1999), 95-107; and Antoine Lutz, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An Introduction," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 500-253

practitioners train their attention. They can sustain a consistent and alert mental posture over time. Second, they learn how to thematise the invariant structures of experiences (“awareness per se”) in the face of changing content.⁴³⁰ This means they are capable of settling the mind into a state of *thematic, pure subjectivity* that is devoid of a transitive structure. Dunne *et al.* describe the culmination of this process as follows:

At the highest level of practice, what we have described as a de-emphasis of both object and subject moves...to a point where no elements of objectivity and subjectivity – whether in the form of conceptual structures, categories of time and space, or some other feature – remain in the experience. At this point, the invariant feature of cognition is said to be realized fully by the meditator, and this is the full-blown state of Open Presence...one ability developed through cultivating Open Presence is the stability of the state – that is, one is not easily perturbed out of the state...in Open Presence the stability is not constituted by the fact that other phenomena do not pull one way from the object on which one focuses. Instead, stability consists of one’s ability to continue to experience phenomena without objectifying them...the state thus seems to cultivate a type of *ipseity* or bare awareness.⁴³¹

To phenomenologically explain what is happening here, contemplative phenomenologists learn to stabilise attention either through one-pointed focus on an object, or through meta-stability of attentiveness that does not objectify changing content. Attention itself is in this way *thematized*, but not through turning attention onto itself; it is therefore not a form of “objectifying thematisation”. The kind of thematisation at work here is one in which the aware-quality of attention becomes the theme (passively) and in this way moves from the background to the foreground of experience. This represents a higher form of *wakefulness* in which self-awareness is *intensified* and *accentuated*.⁴³²

Attention, then, instead of taking itself as an object, simply rests in its attentiveness such that its *conscious-making feature* remains. In this respect, we can say that the objective-pole is *de-thematized* to the point where the luminosity (conscious-making-quality) of self-awareness stands bare without being grasped by a higher-order state. *Pure disclosure*, then, is

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 514. See also B. Alan Wallace, *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Towards A New Science of Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 105-115.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 516-517.

⁴³² Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 186.

a “disclosing modification rather than a concealing falsification”⁴³³ of consciousness, where this modification de-emphasises habitual thematic cognitions and non-intentionally emphasises the invariant, conscious-making self-awareness. Thus self-awareness is given thematically *while still being lived-through pre-reflectively* (there is no reflective activity involved). Therefore, contrary to Zahavi, pre-reflective self-awareness does belong to the range of *phenomenologically observable experiences*, because it can be *thematically examined* (which we have defined as cognitive access) in a way best described as *recognition, apperception, or even gnoseological awareness*.

To review the argument so far: I began in chapter 3 by clarifying the role first-person methods play in neurophenomenology. I then introduced the phenomenological and contemplative method and showed that (i) neurophenomenology has turned to the contemplative method because of its practical expertise (something which the phenomenological method has neglected); (ii) the methodological steps of the phenomenological method and the contemplative method share a logic; (iii) contemplative phenomenologists can train their attention skills to a relevant degree. Following this, in Chapter 4, I explored the common agreement that exists between phenomenologists and myself: that we can have cognitive access to the intentional domain of consciousness through first-person methods. I then considered nine objections to first-person methods. I responded to seven of them in turn. In the midst of this, I provided some reasons to reject representationalism.

In this chapter, I have responded to the eighth objection against first-person methods: How can we thematise self-awareness without objectifying it? To answer this question, I discussed higher-order representational theories of mind to clarify the conscious-making feature of self-awareness. This resulted in a final refutation of such theories on traditional

⁴³³ Ibid., 187.

phenomenological grounds. I also discussed in greater detail the differences between reflective and pre-reflective self-awareness, as well as the difference between reflection and pure reflection. On the basis of these discussions, I developed the thesis that cognitive access is a matter of *thematically lived-through acquaintance with our phenomenal life*.

Finally, I left behind my agreement with continental phenomenology (that we can successfully examine perceptual types of experience) and offered my “Theory of Disclosing” as an account of cognitive access, which considers non-perceptual types of experience to be observable.

The fact that we can have first-personal, cognitive access to non-perceptual types of experience has serious consequences for the theoretical framework of continental phenomenology and neurophenomenology, including Thompson’s continuity thesis.

In my next and final chapter, I will talk about such a non-perceptual type of experience and the consequences that follow from it. In this way, I will also respond to the ninth and last objection to first-person methods, namely that there exists no such thing as a non-perceptual type of experience.

Chapter 6

Contemplative Mind and “Discontinuity”: The Challenges of Pure Consciousness and Phenomenal Selfhood

It would seem quite odd to say if you described who you are (“what is your real self?”) to respond: “It is my primal protention-retention.”⁴³⁴

John Dunne

Now I’d like to say more about the fundamental nature of the mind. There is no reason to believe that the innate mind, the very essential luminous nature of awareness, has neural correlates, because it is not physical, not contingent upon the brain. So while I agree with neuroscience that gross mental states correlate with brain activity, I also feel that on a more subtle level of consciousness, brain and mind are two separate entities.⁴³⁵

Tenzin Gyatso, The Dalai Lama

In this final chapter I will draw on my forays into Varela’s and Thompson’s philosophy of life, neurophenomenology, and first-person methods to explain why (i) we should doubt that time-consciousness really accounts for self-awareness and (ii) there is a conceptual discontinuity between (contemplative) mind and life.

To this end, this chapter will focus on a non-perceptual type of experience that can be found in phenomenological accounts of consciousness derived from the contemplative method. I will show that such accounts are antithetical to the most basic assumptions entertained by continental phenomenology about the fundamental nature of consciousness. In addition, I will point out how significant such a non-perceptual type of experience is for our understanding of phenomenal selfhood. It will become clear that a proper understanding of this type of experience necessitates some discussion of selfhood, and vice versa.

⁴³⁴ John Dunne, “The Reflective Self: Panel Discussion (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” and colleagues Evan Thompson, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and Dan Zahavi, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2855932336893877011&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 1:00:35-1:00:51.

⁴³⁵ The Dalai Lama, “Human Nature: On the Luminosity of Being,” *New Scientist* 178:2396 (May 24, 2003): 42.

I will proceed by showing that we can clarify controversies surrounding the existence and non-existence of self (*ātman*), especially in the matter of the Buddhist doctrine of not-self (*anatta/anātmā*), if we understand how non-perceptual experience and phenomenal selfhood inter-relate. This will lead me to distinguish a (ego-) “self” present in the dualistic structure of ordinary, phenomenal experience from a (non-egological) “Self” associated with the contentless *luminosity* of pure consciousness (non-perceptual experience).

To accomplish this, I will first introduce the non-perceptual type of experience that I have alluded to so frequently throughout this thesis. I will then discuss this type of experience in the context of the ego/self and phenomenal selfhood. I will direct this discussion towards the controversies surrounding the existence or non-existence of self and the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta*. Finally, I will consider what this means for continental phenomenology and Thompson’s continuity thesis. I will argue that *prima facie* (i) continental phenomenologists are wrong about the fundamental nature of consciousness; and (ii) Thompson’s continuity thesis cannot be maintained when we consider the nature of consciousness from the viewpoint of the contemplative mind. On the basis of these two points, I will recommend neurophenomenological research into non-perceptual types of experience to (i) adjudicate between continental and contemplative phenomenology; and (ii) see whether or not we can support Thompson’s idea that there is deep continuity between life and mind.

6.1 Pure Consciousness: A Non-perceptual Type of Experience

In Chapter 2, I distinguished two basic kinds of experience: heteronomous and autonomous.

Heteronomous experiences are perceptual types in which intentionality is operative in a narrow (with subject-object structure) or broad manner (without subject-object structure, but open and affected by the world). Such experiences are other-determined, and our subjectivity is open.

Autonomous experiences are non-perceptual and lack any kind of operative

intentionality. This denotes an even more radical absence of intentionality than we can find in experiences that lack a strict subject-object structure, such as moods and feelings, which are broadly intentional. Non-intentional experiences differ because they are self-determined. In this type of experience our subjectivity is self-enclosed.

Traditionally, continental phenomenologists believe that experience is “Janus-faced” because it is necessarily both intentional and self-aware. Thus self-awareness only occurs alongside intentional experience, because this *conscious-making feature* is built into, and thus requires, the intentional acts of consciousness. Dan Zahavi says:

From a phenomenological perspective, or from a Husserlian perspective, or for that matter also for – I think – Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, there would be something misleading about understanding reflexivity and intentionality as two separate issues. They must be brought together, and I think that this is to some extent spelt out when they emphasise, for instance this is something Heidegger would pronounce very clearly, he would say that self-experience [self-awareness] is something that only occurs together with world-experience [intentionality].⁴³⁶

This statement tells us that many well-known phenomenologists believe that subjectivity must be open, and that there is no experience of “self” (-awareness) divorced from an experience of the world. They conclude this on the basis of philosophical analysis of experience.

However, contemplative phenomenologists who emphasise a more rigorous, practical approach to the epoché (as part of the phenomenological method) conclude differently when they investigate consciousness. They offer us *prima facie* phenomenological evidence that objectifying processes can be *de-emphasised*, and in this way the intentional activities of consciousness come to recede.⁴³⁷ When the fluctuations of consciousness recede to a

⁴³⁶ Dan Zahavi, “The Reflective Self: Questions and Answers, Part I (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” and colleagues Evan Thompson, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and Dan Zahavi, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2369129033678559744&hl=en&emb=1#docid=6084386910063768436> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 32:00-32:39.

⁴³⁷ The evidence we need to consider here is empirical and not philosophical. See Antoine Lutz, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, “Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson

sufficient degree, self-awareness remains as the only theme, and without intentional (temporal) content. In this way, the *reflexivity of awareness* – where reflexivity does not entail any fissuring of consciousness – is the phenomenal “content” of the lived-through condition.⁴³⁸ This kind of content is unlike any other, because it is not “about” anything external to the subject. The state is worldless.

This may also be described as a “contentless” form of consciousness, where “contentless” represents the denial of objectified and intentional content. It is a negation of the mind-world relation, where “world” is conceived to be that which is external to the subject and cannot be encompassed by him (the transcendent). Forman defines such a non-perceptual type of experience as “what persists when the human being persists without content.”⁴³⁹ In this context, a synonym of consciousness ought not to be “‘awareness of anything (intentional) at all’, but rather ‘awareness per se’ which can (and usually does) become aware of things.”⁴⁴⁰ This is a kind of *state of awareness* identified by contemplative phenomenologists as the most basic form of consciousness.⁴⁴¹ Forman defines the encounter with this basic form of consciousness, or *awareness per se*, as a “pure consciousness event” (this phrasing avoids the problems we encounter with the terms “experience” and “of”).⁴⁴²

(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 500-501, 506-508, 513-521; and Robert K. C. Forman, “Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting,” in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 25-30; Robert K. C. Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness* (State University of New York Press, 1999), 11-30; and Shear, Jonathan and Ron Jevning, “Pure Consciousness: Scientific Exploration of Meditation Techniques,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6:2-3 (1999): 189-194, 204-205.

⁴³⁸ Dunne argues that such states are based on empirical claims from trained contemplative practitioners, often from Buddhist traditions, but not limited to them. On the basis of his research, Dunne affirms that “one can induce a state in which the sole ‘content’ is reflexive awareness”. This means that one can be trained to enter states in which the only remaining “structure” is *reflexivity* (“of” awareness). See John Dunne, “Buddhist Epistemology and the Ways in which It Might Help Inform Western Conceptions of Mind and Consciousness (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008.”

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6115189118596625142&hl=en&emb=1#docid=-5575974425081410604> (accessed August 26, 2010).

⁴³⁹ Robert K. C. Forman, (Ed.), *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7

⁴⁴⁰ Robert K. C. Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness* (State University of New York Press, 1999), 112.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Robert K. C. Forman, “Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting,” in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8.

The phenomenal quality of this type of experience is the *conscious-making feature* of self-awareness itself, which is a necessary *a priori* condition to perceptual types of experience. In this event, we encounter *awareness only* which is pure, silent, and empty of all “phenomenal” objects or presentations of a transcendent world (external reality to the subject). Rather, it is a “settled” condition that nevertheless remains alert, but not through intentional activity (or time-consciousness for that matter). Thus *pure subjectivity* is also described as “the mind [that] has become completely ‘settled’ while nevertheless remaining alert”. It is a state in which “one steps outside of all activity of perception” but still remains “silent and fully awake inside”.⁴⁴³ This entails that self-awareness is the *conscious-making capacity* of human beings independent and prior to all activity of perception.

Let us consider some accounts of such pure consciousness events:

PCE 1:

*Without knowing what to expect, I began to drift down into deeper and deeper levels of relaxation, as if I were sinking into my chair. Then for some time, perhaps for a minute or a few minutes, I experienced a silent inner state of no thoughts; just pure awareness and nothing else; then again I became aware of my surroundings.*⁴⁴⁴

PCE 2:

The second report describes how, if pure consciousness events are undergone regularly, such experiences can mature over time. It is one of the most detailed and precise descriptions

Forman has come across:

There would just be a sort of complete silence void of content. The whole awareness would turn in, and there would be no thought, no activity, and no perception, yet it was somehow comforting. It was just there and I could know when I was in it. There wasn't a great “Oh, I am experiencing this.” It was very natural and innocent. But I did not yet identify myself with this silent, content-free inner space. It was a self-contained entity

⁴⁴³ Shear, Jonathan and Ron Jevning, “Pure Consciousness: Scientific Exploration of Meditation Techniques,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6:2-3 (1999): 194.

⁴⁴⁴ Robert K. C. Forman, “Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting,” in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 27. Cited Charles N. Alexander, Ken Chandler, and Robert W. Boyer, “Experience and Understanding of Pure Consciousness in the Vedic Science of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi,” unpublished paper, pp. 5-6.

that I transcended to and experienced.

Then, with increased familiarity, and contingent on the amount of rest I had, the... process became more and more natural. At this point I began to appreciate that this inner space was not an emptiness but simply silent consciousness without content or activity, and I began to recognize in it the essence of my own self as pure consciousness. Eventually, even the thin boundary that had previously separated individuality from unbounded pure consciousness began to dissolve. The “I” as a separate entity just started to have no meaning. The boundaries that I put on myself became like a mesh, a net; it became porous and then dissolved; only unbroken pure consciousness or existence remains. Once I let go of the veil of individuality, there is no longer “I perceiving” or “I aware.” There is only that, there is nothing else there. In this state the experiencer is not experiencing as it normally does. It is there ready to experience, but the function has ceased. There is no thought, there is no activity, there is no experiencer, but the physiology after that state is incredible. It is like a power surge of complete purity.⁴⁴⁵

PCE 3:

I had been meditating alone in my room all morning when someone knocked on my door. I heard the knock perfectly clearly, and upon hearing it I knew that, although there was no “waking up” before hearing the knock, for some indeterminate length of time prior to the knocking I had not been aware of anything in particular. I had been awake but with no content for my consciousness. Had no one knocked I doubt that I would ever have become aware that I had not been thinking or perceiving. The experience was so unremarkable, as it was utterly without content, that I simply would have begun at some point to recommence thinking and probably would never have taken note of my conscious persistence devoid of mental content.⁴⁴⁶

PCE 4:

When Shear is prompted about the pure consciousness event, he provides following helpful analysis:

By all accounts it is not like anything. For it has no content in it at all to make it more like any one thing than any other. And in as much as it contains no content at all, no colours, no images, sounds, thoughts, anticipations, etc. – or even any subjective manifold where such content could be located – whatever one can imagine is necessarily irrelevant to it... Nevertheless, while the experience cannot be imagined, its defining characteristic – the complete absence of empirical content – can readily be specified

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, 27-28. Cited Charles N. Alexander, Ken Chandler, and Robert W. Boyer, “Experience and Understanding of Pure Consciousness in the Vedic Science of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi,” unpublished paper, p. 6.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, 28.

conceptually. This allows us to think about the experience coherently, even if we can't *imagine* it. The seemingly merely negative definition of the experience might seem odd or contrived, if one has never had the experience. Nevertheless it is still useful. For if one has never had the experience, one can recognize that one has never had any experience corresponding to this odd definition, and by the same token, after having the experience, one can, by all reports, equally recognize that one *has* had it. Thinking about the experience in this (or any other) way is, of course, useless for *gaining* it, as traditional texts often emphasize. But the definition will serve as a useful beginning point for scientific investigation into the status of the experience itself.⁴⁴⁷

From the above reports we can extract following salient features: (i) the conscious event is conscious *simpliciter*, because (ii) the conscious-making feature of self-awareness persists despite (iii) the absence of intentionality and any temporal or objectified object; and (iv) the state is characterised by an absence of the world such that the self-aware condition is not determined by it in any way. The conscious event is therefore worldless and self-enclosed.

Traditionally, self-awareness is said to be conscious because intentional acts are implicitly self-aware. This can be depicted as follows:

However, the contemplative method yields *prima facie* evidence that self-awareness is independently conscious. Buddhist phenomenologists call this innate *conscious-making feature* “Luminosity”.⁴⁴⁸ A lived-through encounter with *awareness per se* can be illustrated with the help of a different model:

⁴⁴⁷ Shear, Jonathan and Ron Jevning, “Pure Consciousness: Scientific Exploration of Meditation Techniques,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6:2-3 (1999): 195.

⁴⁴⁸ According to Dunne, contemplative phenomenologists regard this to be the “invariable feature of all experiences”. They give this invariable feature various descriptions, one of them being “luminosity”. Dunne emphasises that it is not relevant what terminology is employed to capture this invariable feature, but “the point is that the invariant element in experience is that which, from a phenomenological standpoint, makes it possible for the subject-object relation to be presented in experience”. Antoine Lutz, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, “Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 514. See also B. Alan Wallace, *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* [Chapter 7. *Śamatha*: The Contemplative Refinement of Attention] (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 143.

Contemplative methods have progressive steps in place to disclose pure consciousness and to thematise pre-reflective self-awareness. Dunne discusses those steps within the context of a meditative state called “Open Presence” (*Rig-pa Chôg-zhag*) cultivated in Tibetan Buddhism.⁴⁴⁹ The steps are:

- (1) to develop *concentration* on an object;
- (2) to cultivate awareness of subjectivity in such a way that the object is *de-emphasised*.

Once step two is accomplished the practitioner gains “phenomenal access” (thematic acquaintance) to the reflexivity of awareness.

- (3) To de-emphasise subjectivity articulated in terms of an (ego-) “I” located in the past and present (to enhance the access to reflexivity);
- (4) to fully realise the *Luminosity* or *Awareness* that makes all cognitions possible (the invariant *conscious-making feature*), and in which no elements of subjectivity and objectivity remain in the experience.

In the final step, the content of the experience “does not appear as an object over against a subject [no reflection or self-othering], and the experience also does not involve a sense of subjectivity that is articulated by [traditional] structures”.⁴⁵⁰ Thus we have a non-objectifying and thematic acquaintance with awareness itself through a non-perceptual and non-intentional

⁴⁴⁹ Antoine Lutz, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, “Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness: An Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. Philip David Zelazo, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 513-517.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 517.

condition.

The methodological steps from above can be illustrated with the help of Dunne's schematic diagram:⁴⁵¹

Stage	Object	Subject	Reflexive Awareness
1	+	-	-
2	-	+	+
3	-	-	+
4	Ø	Ø	+ +

Legend: “-” = de-emphasis; “+” = emphasis; “Ø” = absent

In the above diagram we can see the interplay of *emphasis* and *de-emphasis* through which features of consciousness are moved into the background (thematised) or pulled forward to the foreground (un-thematised) in the “subject’s” phenomenal life. What is important here is that the thematic process is a passive one. Rather than relying on objectifying and reflecting activities to attend to the unthematic background, the thematic process relies on de-emphasising the foreground of experience to thematise that which is invariably and implicitly already in the background.

Once the condition of pure consciousness sets in the ego-pole is lost. Subjects report the absence of a sense of localised *ipseity*, as well as perspectival givenness that accompanies the ordinary, first-person mode of experiencing. This raises questions about phenomenal selfhood.

6.2 Egological vs. Non-egological Consciousness:

Phenomenal Selfhood, Self-awareness, and the Buddhist Doctrine of Anatta

In order to understand pure consciousness, we need to take into account the fact that to phenomenally encounter it entails that we live through a state devoid of objectified content,

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 515.

and in which our familiar sense of self is lost. Thus the absence of subject-object structure affects not only the object-pole of consciousness, but also its ego-pole. In what sense, then, can such a state be held to be *self*-enclosed? To answer this question, we need to discuss in greater detail the subject of selfhood.

There is no consensus on what it means to be a self. In fact, Strawson summed up the discussion on the self in 1999 by enumerating twenty-one different concepts of self.⁴⁵² Here, I intend to discuss selfhood in a *phenomenological* context in order to consider egological and non-egological theories of consciousness alongside the issue of *ipseity* (selfhood, as derived from the Latin, *ipse*⁴⁵³) in pure consciousness.

To begin, I believe it is helpful to follow Albahari's example and distinguish between the "self" and a "sense of self".⁴⁵⁴ This distinction is an apt move from a phenomenological point of view, because it allows us to continue discussing the phenomenology of experience (the experiential *phenomenon of a sense of self*), while leaving open the question of whether or not the *self itself* (as a substantial entity) really exists. This means that we can have a sense of self even if the self as an entity does not exist (the term "sense" is therefore not a success term in this context⁴⁵⁵).

Albahari's distinction is also helpful, because it allows us to concentrate on what is most central for this project: the relationship between consciousness *simpliciter* (pre-reflective self-awareness) and phenomenal selfhood. The question about this relationship is whether *self*-awareness is an awareness of *a self*, or whether it is the *self-aware* (conscious-

⁴⁵² G. Strawson, "The Self and the SESMET," in *Models of the Self*, eds. Shaun Gallagher and Jonathan Shear (Thorverton: Imprint Academic, 1999), 484.

⁴⁵³ Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 115.

⁴⁵⁴ Miri Albahari, *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 16-18. To consider a discussion of and response to Albahari's work on this matter see Dan Zahavi, "The Unity of Consciousness and the Problem of Self (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008)," <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6115189118596625142&hl=en&emb=1#docid=-2119641525702205484> (accessed July 31, 2010).

⁴⁵⁵ Miri Albahari, *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 18-19.

making) feature of experience itself, that is, the awareness that experience has of *itself*.⁴⁵⁶

To address this relationship between consciousness and phenomenal selfhood, I aim to clarify the question of whether self-awareness is egological or non-egological. This is important for the following reason: According to Dunne, contemplative practitioners can experience pre-reflective self-awareness, in the form of *reflexivity only* (the self-aware and conscious-making feature of subjectivity), without introducing any transitivity (subject-object structure characteristic of reflection). Hence Dunne argues that in such a state, there is no pre-reflective, minimal sense of subjectivity; no subject is present.⁴⁵⁷ What does this mean? Is the sense of minimal subjectivity the same thing as the sense of a subject-self, and does this sense necessarily entail a transitive structure of consciousness?

Before we can answer these questions, we must first discuss egological and non-egological theories of consciousness. The distinction between the two amounts to whether or not it is meaningful to speak of a subjectless or egoless self-awareness.⁴⁵⁸

An egological theory of consciousness claims that when I listen to a melody, then I am (i) intentionally directed towards the melody that is being heard and (ii) I am also aware that the melody is being heard by *me*, that is, that “I” am hearing it. We can thus say that Dunne holds an egological view of self-awareness, because for him it entails a subject-self. He contrasts this with *pure reflexivity* as a distinct non-egological condition of consciousness.

A non-egological theory of consciousness claims that we should conceive self-awareness to simply be the acquaintance that consciousness has with itself. We should thus say that *there is* awareness of experiencing, or *there is* hearing the melody, rather than the melody being heard by *me*. Such conscious acts lack “I”-awareness.

⁴⁵⁶ Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 146.

⁴⁵⁷ John Dunne, “The Reflective Self: Panel Discussion (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” and colleagues Evan Thompson, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and Dan Zahavi, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2855932336893877011&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 47:19.

⁴⁵⁸ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 138.

Sartre is famous for adopting a non-egological perspective of consciousness. In his view, we can only know through (self-) othering (via an epistemic duality). We have already discussed this in the context of examining self-awareness: self-othering denotes a polarisation of reality which gives birth to the (ego-) self – a polarisation that is not present in pure consciousness. Thus Sartre believes that pre-reflective self-awareness has no egological structure. Experiences which are lived-through in an absorbed way have no ego-dimension. It is only when a distancing and objectifying attitude is adopted that the ego appears. However, the appearance of the ego is merely one of an object, not a subject. This means that when we reflect upon experience, the reflecting component remains without egological structure. There is no I-consciousness involved; only a consciousness *of I* arises.⁴⁵⁹

In this process, reflection plays an important role. Sartre believed that it is reflection that gives rise to the ego as an object of consciousness. This can be explained by pointing out that when we reflect, we thematise what is pre-reflectively already implicit in our experience. During thematisation, we continue to be aware of the intentional object of experience, but our experience is thereby modified. The object is “recognised” rather than merely “registered”, and in this way takes on a conceptual dimension. Through modification, experience is finally owned or experienced by a subject (ego). In this way, “thematized experience acquires an egological structure” because “reflection situates the experience within an egological context”.⁴⁶⁰ Sartre’s view, then, is a non-egological one: pre-reflective subjectivity is subjectless and egoless, while reflective experience is egological. Thus Sartre’s view contrasts with Dunne’s who argues that pre-reflective subjectivity includes a minimal sense of a subject or ego (it might also be possible that they are simply talking past each other!).

Zahavi does not share Sartre’s view. He believes that Sartre operates with too narrow a concept of ego. According to Zahavi, we can describe “the very first-personal mode of

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 141.

givenness of an experience as its most basic form of egocentricity”.⁴⁶¹ If we accept this, then the ego does not stand apart from the flow of experiencing, but is inbuilt into its very structure. Zahavi thus argues that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty get it wrong when they distinguish between the phrases “there is a perception of a chair” and “somebody perceives a chair”. According to Zahavi, they overlook a crucial detail:

When I and my alter ego simultaneously perceive a chair, both of these prereflective perceptions might be anonymous in the sense of lacking an explicit thematisation of the ego. But they are not anonymous in the sense of being undifferentiated... there remains a vital difference between the two individuated perceptions. Only one of them is given in a first-personal mode of presentation for me, and I would be unable to perceive the chair if that were not the case. I take this to be a decisive and sufficient argument against the nonegological theory of consciousness.⁴⁶²

What Zahavi is saying is that the first-personal givenness of experience permits us to distinguish between “my” own experiences and the experiences of others. On the one hand, first-personal givenness describes how phenomenal awareness of experiencing *is occurring* to “me”, where “me” means that there is at least something it is like to experience what is being phenomenally disclosed – it is not happening in the dark. On the other hand, the first-personal mode of experiencing that occurs to others is phenomenally unavailable to me. There is nothing it is like for “me” to live through their experiences. Their experiences are in fact “fundamentally inaccessible to me”. Zahavi refers to this quality as the “primary presence of experience”.⁴⁶³ In this way, he argues that we should accept consciousness as possessing a fundamental egocentricity (prior to any designation of “personal”).⁴⁶⁴

From this discussion we can phenomenologically distinguish two levels of egocentricity (selfhood): (i) The *proprietary sense of self* that is present in I-consciousness. It denotes the feeling of ownership of experience, which is conceptualised as given to *me* as

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 142.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 142.

mine. This is the *subject-self* that is present in reflected and thematised experience. (ii) The *minimal self* or *core self* which grants consciousness of *oneself* in the sense that one is simply conscious of an experience in its first-personal mode of givenness. For Zahavi, this is a matter of having first-personal access to one's own experiential life. The continental phenomenologist Henry also believes that this is the most basic form of selfhood: it is one determined by *the very self-manifestation of experience*.⁴⁶⁵ It is also what separates the experience as something lived-through instead of being inaccessible (as the experience of someone else). This is the *experiential sense of self* that Zahavi considers most fundamental, because whatever lacks this dimension cannot be called a self.⁴⁶⁶

This raises the question whether Zahavi's minimal egological stance of consciousness (the mere self-manifestation of experience in its first-personal mode of givenness) is actually harmonious with Dunne's non-egological view of *pure reflexivity*,⁴⁶⁷ which is devoid of a subject and intentional experiencing. This is important because Dunne says that this *pure reflexivity* (i) lacks even a minimal sense of subjectivity and (ii) is devoid of intentional mental acts (subject-object structure). He also affirms that it is experienced, although in an intransitive (non-dual) way. If we accept both Dunne's and Zahavi's emphasis on *experiential access*, however, Dunne's view and Zahavi's view come closer to each other, because Zahavi's account requires of subjectivity only that it is experientially given.

At this point we might raise three further questions: (i) In what sense does Zahavi's account capture what we mean by selfhood – even phenomenal selfhood? (ii) Can the first-personal mode of givenness – which is necessarily perspectival (indexical and positional: it has a point of view) – really be equated with just the *self-aware* and *conscious-making*

⁴⁶⁵ Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 106.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Dunne's nonegological view of pure reflexivity is derived from Dharmakirti's epistemology of cognition. See John Dunne, "Buddhist Epistemology and the Ways in which It Might Help Inform Western Conceptions of Mind and Consciousness (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008)." <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6115189118596625142&hl=en&emb=1#docid=-5575974425081410604> (accessed August 26, 2010).

feature of experience, which allows experience to be aware of *it-self*? (iii) According to Zahavi and Thompson, first-personal givenness is nothing other than the self-awareness of intentional acts. The structure of self-awareness is furthermore that of the threefold structure of time consciousness, and this entails that self-awareness depends on intentional experience. But this does not seem to be true in the kind of *pure reflexivity* Dunne is talking about (i.e., the pure consciousness event). We can then ask whether first-personal givenness is really necessarily transitive? If not, are there other modes of givenness in which experience can manifest itself that do not entail Zahavi's *minimal sense of self* (i.e., intransitive first-personal givenness of transitive experiencing)?

Dunne argues, after Dharmakirti, that *pure reflexivity* has no subject-object structure. It is neither perspectival in this sense nor positional. It de-emphasises both object-pole and ego-pole. The kind of phenomenal givenness involved is not of the same structure as Zahavi's perspectival and positional first-personal mode of experiencing. Dunne says that if you live through a pure consciousness event, then you

do not have first-personal access in the sense that it does not present itself as being your experience as opposed to somebody else's experience... That is actually a primary feature of that experience and this also correlates to some degree across [contemplative] traditions. Thus, you can induce these states and they involve complete loss of a sense of self and hence also a sense of there being a subject – that I am observing something.⁴⁶⁸

This means that from an empirical standpoint we have *prima facie* phenomenological evidence (first-person data) that we can have cognitive access to the fundamental nature of consciousness, and that this is non-egological, because it is neither perspectival nor positional. It does not display a localised sense of *ipseity* that would indicate a subtle fissure in self-awareness. Any such fissure would give rise to an ego-pole and an *awareness of a self*. Thus the conscious-making feature does not contain Zahavi's minimal, core sense of self.

⁴⁶⁸ John Dunne, "The Reflective Self: Panel Discussion (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008)," and colleagues Evan Thompson, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and Dan Zahavi, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2855932336893877011&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 47:19-48:00.

The question now is whether the first-personal mode of givenness in general entails indexicality. It is clear that Dharmakirti and Dunne wish to say, when they state that *pure reflexivity does not have even a minimal sense of subjectivity*, that it has no subject-pole which functions as the locus of perspectival experience. Dunne in fact says: “I am pushing against the notion that it is necessary, in order for phenomenological theory to operate, to have an essentialist perspective on that structure [of perspectival givenness]. I do not see why this is necessary.”⁴⁶⁹ He re-affirms that *non-dual, pure reflexivity is non-positional, non-perspectival*, and *non-local* (that there is no “here-ness” to the experience). In his view – and that of contemplative practitioners – perspectival givenness is not the only mode in which phenomenal life must operate, contrary to the claims of continental phenomenologists. What does this say about phenomenal selfhood?

I believe that a sophisticated distinction between (i) a minimal, core sense of (ego-) self, which only operates with a dualistic structure of consciousness; and (ii) a non-egological but phenomenally lived-through subjectivity, which operates with a non-dualistic structure of consciousness, is capable of shedding light on long-lasting debates surrounding the existence and non-existence of self, especially in the matter of Buddhist philosophy and objectors to the doctrine of not-self (*anatta/anātman*). Let us briefly consider some implications of this possibility.

First, I want to point out some misunderstandings about the Buddhist teaching of not-self. Many interpretations of Buddhism (popular and academic) present the Buddhist system, or even the Buddha himself, as having literally denied the existence of Ātman. For example, “[The] Buddhist *anatta* or no-self doctrine rejects not only selves but the Self.”⁴⁷⁰

Contemporary views of Buddhist teachings also claim that the doctrine of *anatta* demarcates “authentic” from “inauthentic” Buddhism. In this manner, Malalasekera claims that the

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 55:55.

⁴⁷⁰ R. L. Franklin, “Postconstructivist Approaches to Mysticism,” in *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 240.

doctrine of *anatta* (not-self) is thought to be the unique discovery of the Buddha that also sets Buddhism apart from “all other religions, creeds, and systems of philosophy.”⁴⁷¹ Thus on the one hand, many interpret the Buddha’s doctrine of *anatta* to be an unqualified denial. On the other hand, we find the view that the doctrine of *anatta* is what defines “authentic” Buddhism.

For my purposes, I will refer to views that present the Buddhist philosophical system to (1) deny all notions of Ātman (without considering issues of definition of both Ātman and the Buddhist absolute), and (2) depend on the doctrine of *anatta* for its authenticity, as “received views”⁴⁷² of Buddhism. Whenever interpretations of Buddhism are fixated on the doctrine of *anatta* in this way (as an unqualified negation and definitive characteristic), we encounter an instance of “*ātma*-phobia”, which declares all talk about the nature of selfhood to be un-Buddhist.

I speak of a phobia because Buddhism does deny that various notions apply to a self, but the Buddhist system only judges the notions analysed by the Buddha in the *Samyutta Nikāya* to be impermanent and not-of-the-self (*anatta*). Therefore, it is actually incorrect to hold that Buddhism denies the existence of the S/self itself. It is important to point out that nowhere in authoritative Buddhist texts is the self ever denied existence. The Buddha in fact made explicit that we should refrain from both positing the existence and the non-existence of the self. All the Buddha ever did in the famous *Samyutta Nikāya* 22.59 (the analysis of not-self) was to identify possible notions of self and to declare them as “not-of-the-self”, “not-

⁴⁷¹ Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 4, cited Malalasekera (1957) pp. 33-4.

⁴⁷² To elaborate on this definition, “received views” of Buddhist teachings denote (a) any dogmatic interpretation of an “essence” of Buddhism that is fixated on the doctrine of *anatta* (which amounts to *ātma*-phobia) as the sole arbiter to identify “true” and “authentic” Buddhism; (b) any historical or contemporary view that presents Buddhist teachings (especially via the *anatta* analysis of the Buddha) as denying all notions of Ātman without considering issues of definition, and (c) views that then take this denial further by turning away from the striking parallels and interrelationship that exists between specific concepts of Ātman and Buddhist depictions of the Absolute (also referred to in later Buddhist traditions as the Buddha-Nature) and dispensing with intrinsically Buddhist teachings because they resemble various formulations of Ātman, which, however, do not stand in conflict with the original analysis of the Buddha in the first place.

self”, or in his own words, “this I am not”, and “this is not my Self”.⁴⁷³

Furthermore, following Ruegg, Schmithausen, and Harvey, I affirm that a sensitive approach does allow one to engage in “self-talk” in a Buddhist framework, contrary to the *ātma*-phobic rut a lot of discourse on Theravāda Buddhism has manoeuvred itself into. As Ruegg points out, “in evaluating the interrelation of the theory of the *tathāgatagarbha* with the *ātmavāda*, everything depends on just what the Buddhist and Brāhmanical philosophers mean by the word *ātman*.”⁴⁷⁴ In this respect, Mahāyāna Buddhism demonstrates a high level of sensitivity and accuracy in their reflections on the absolute and selfhood. They take into account the fact that their theories can work if their notions of the absolute and the S/self are appropriately defined and separated from inconsistent formulations. This philosophical sophistication of the Mahāyāna allows them to engage in “self-talk” without compromising their original position that the ego-self or soul has no substantial existence (*nairātma* and *śūnyatā*).⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷³ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, “The Not-self Strategy,”

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/notself.html> (accessed November 20, 2007); Thanissaro Bhikkhu, “The Mind Like Fire Unbound: An Image in the Early Buddhist Discourses,”

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/likefire/2-2.html> (accessed November 20, 2007). The Buddhologist Ruegg agrees on this. He says: “it would be quite incorrect to represent Buddhism as invariably asserting the non-existence of self and making a dogma of *nairātma* and *śūnyatā*.” See David Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective: On the Transmission and Reception of Buddhism in India and Tibet* (University of London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1989), 43. Schmithausen, another Buddhologist, concurs: “To my mind [the] position that the denial of a self is the central message of original Buddhism cannot be taken for granted. To be sure, the canonical texts of Early Buddhism frequently teach, with the spiritual aim of evoking detachment, that the observable constituents of a person – the *skandhas* – are not the (or a) self (*attā*, *ātman*). But...there is hardly any explicit statement in the Nikāyas declaring that a self does not exist...I for one strongly hesitate to accept, as the core of the original message of the Buddha, a doctrine which is nowhere explicitly stated in the vast corpus of early canonical Buddhist literature...From my point of view, denying the authenticity of these ubiquitous elements of canonical Buddhism in favour of a theoretical doctrine ascribed to it on the basis of mere inference (to the extent of denying the soteriological core) is utterly arbitrary.” See Lambert Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature: The Lecture delivered on the Occasion of the EXPO 1990. An Enlarged Version with Notes* (Studia Philologica Buddhica Occasional Paper Series VII. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2003), 57-58. For some additional discussion on the misrepresentation of Buddhist philosophy in matters of the self see also Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism* (Curzon Press, 1995), 7.

⁴⁷⁴ David Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective: On the Transmission and Reception of Buddhism in India and Tibet* (University of London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1989), 20.

⁴⁷⁵ David Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective: On the Transmission and Reception of Buddhism in India and Tibet* (University of London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1989), 44.

I contend that at least some Vedic notions of Ātman are in fact compatible with the Buddhist doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha-Nature) because they do not contradict the doctrine of *nairātmya* (i.e., non-substantiality).⁴⁷⁶ Ruegg has also adamantly argued that the Mahāyāna is capable of employing “self-talk” because theory and definition coincide in such a way that they can use the term Ātman to refer to the supreme nature of a Buddha.⁴⁷⁷ Chen gives a few good explanations for this:

Asaṅga did indeed mention “*Sudhātman*,” “*Mahātman*” and “*Paramātman*” in his *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*... The verse in which these terms appear reads like this: “The Buddhas’ immaculate Self obtained through the emptiness which leads to the realization of *nairātmya* is called the ‘*Paramātman*’ [Supreme Self]. Because the Buddhas are completely free from any false conception of *ātman*, they obtain the ‘*Mahātman*’ [Great Self].”⁴⁷⁸

In a similar way, after all false ideation about the self is removed, the supreme *nairātmya* (which is the *vimala tathata*) realized by the Buddhas is then called the “*Mahātman*,” and “*Paramātman*.”⁴⁷⁹

It therefore turns the *nairātmya* into a Supreme *Ātman*. Being unattached to any entities or conceptions of the ego, this supreme *Ātman* should not be confused with the empirical ego generally conceived in the five *skandhas* or the *ātman* advocated by heretics... In short, the *nairātmya* attained by the Buddha is the very essence of his *Ātman* which is called the *Paramātman* or the *Mahātman*.⁴⁸⁰

Chen’s pointers clearly distinguish the ego-self from a notion of Self that identifies what is absolutely real and stands outside of the domain of *samsāra* (which the Buddha transcends with the onset of *nirvāṇa*). This notion of Self remains untouched by the Buddha’s famous analysis of not-self in the *Samyutta Nikāya*.⁴⁸¹

It stands to reason that Buddhism relies heavily on phenomenology and the correction

⁴⁷⁶ This rests on the fact that when we wish to evaluate “the interrelation of the theory of the *tathāgatagarbha* with the *ātmavāda*, everything depends on just what the Buddhist and Brāhmanical philosophers mean by the word *ātman*”. This also holds true for the Buddha-Nature. David Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective: On the Transmission and Reception of Buddhism in India and Tibet* (University of London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1989), 20.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁷⁸ Shu-Hui J. Chen, “Affirmation in Negation: A Study of the Tathāgatagarbha Theory in the Light of the Bodhisattva Practices” (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1998), 393.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 394.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 400.

⁴⁸¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, transl. from Pali, “Samyutta Nikāya 22.59. Pañcavaggi Sutta: Five Brethren (aka: Anatta-lakkhana Sutta: The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic),” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.059.than.html> (accessed October 5, 2010).

of our ordinary and mistaken phenomenal experience for liberation.⁴⁸² In this way, the Buddhist approach to the self is to try and find the one thing that is invariant; all else is denied the nature of Self.⁴⁸³ To find this invariant structure is to become phenomenally acquainted with it through a kind of cognitive access that discloses this invariable feature in a non-perceptual way, best described as *recognition* or *gnoseological awareness*. In such a state, as we have already discussed, the ego-pole is absent and any perspectival access (a polarising, indexical, or positional stance) to experience. However, it is still phenomenologically lived-through in a mode of givenness that is non-dual and without even a minimal sense of (ego-) self.

Now if we accept Zahavi's account of the self, then experience has an implicit phenomenal sense of self in two respects: (i) it is phenomenally lived-through; and (ii) it is phenomenally lived-through with a perspective or with the help of a position. (ii) Gives rise to the ego-pole, but (i) does not – as the pure consciousness event suggests. Pure consciousness is thus phenomenally lived-through, but without egocentricity (subject-pole). Additionally, pure consciousness is also characterised as *luminosity* without content (an *immaculateness of mind without defilements*, as some Mahāyāna texts refer to it⁴⁸⁴) and might qualify to be identified as the “Self”, because it is the invariant structure of the mind. It is also important to appreciate that Buddhist philosophy (both Theravada and Mahāyāna) affirms the reality of an unrestricted and luminous awareness which stands outside of the analysis of the five *skandhas* (the components of a person that are denied to be of the nature of self).⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸² John Dunne, “The Reflective Self: Questions and Answers, Part I (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2369129033678559744&hl=en&emb=1#docid=6084386910063768436> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 8:00-13:00.

⁴⁸³ John Dunne, “The Reflective Self: Panel Discussion (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” and colleagues Evan Thompson, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and Dan Zahavi, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2855932336893877011&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010).

⁴⁸⁴ Jikidō Takasaki, *A Study in the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra): Being a Treatise on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Roma: Is. M. E. O., 1966), 231.

⁴⁸⁵ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, “The Mind Like Fire Unbound: An Image in the Early Buddhist Discourses,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/likefire/2-2.html> (accessed November 20, 2007); and

Hence we can distinguish a (ego-) self from a Self that stands outside of the dualistic structure of ordinary, phenomenal experience. In this way, we can agree with Zahavi that a minimal sense of (ego-) self must entail perspectival givenness, just as Sartre affirmed that duality and the fissuring of consciousness gives rise to the ego. We can also coherently endorse the idea that pure consciousness transcends this notion of phenomenal selfhood, although we might still wish to refer to it as Self (however, with a different meaning, similar to the way Vedic philosophy and some strands of Mahāyāna Buddhism employ the term Self to refer to a higher-tier Self).⁴⁸⁶ This higher-tier Self entails the continuation of phenomenal awareness, but without an individual and separate sense of ego (as an objectified existence).⁴⁸⁷

To sum up: (i) the phenomenal event of pure consciousness transcends egocentricity; (ii) it is meaningful to speak of a subjectless or egoless pre-reflective self-awareness (where “self” denotes the acquaintance that consciousness has with *itself* rather than an ego-identity); (iii) Zahavi’s notion of a minimal, core self remains unchallenged to speak about the phenomenal sense of individuated and separate selfhood involved in intentional experience; (iv) by adding another level of selfhood to Zahavi’s already articulated two-tier distinction of self (proprietary and minimal), we might be able to make more sense of the debates surrounding selfhood, especially the popular interpretation of the Buddhist doctrine of not-self and opposing views that equate a nonegological “Self” with the fundamental invariant

Brian Edward Brown, *The Buddha Nature: A Study of the Tathāgatagarbha and Ālayavijñāna* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1991), 89.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ For example, the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (“RGV”) points out that this higher-tier condition (the supreme Self) is “pure because of [its] innate purity and removal of impressions”; it is “the highest unity because [it] is quiescent, having destroyed the dualistic view of ego”. It explains that the prolific propensity of the mind to entertain objectified content is completely removed, and that, therefore, contrary to the impermanent nature of *samsāra*, the state attained is eternal because the subject “has realized the equality of the phenomenal life and *nirvāṇa*”. Thus, phenomenal awareness persists, but without egocentricity. It is a condition that is undifferentiated, non-discriminative, and non-dual. This “highest reality” of phenomenal awareness is furthermore only *recognisable* through *quiescent introspection* (gnoseologically) and not via subject-object structured perception. See Jikidō Takasaki, *A Study in the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra): Being a Treatise on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Roma: Is. M. E. O., 1966), 6, 218-219

structure of consciousness; (v) when discussing the nature of self and the phenomenal sense of self, then it is important to consider different modes of phenomenal givenness in relation to distinct perceptual and non-perceptual types of experience.

Pure consciousness thus points toward the non-egological nature of consciousness, at least in its most fundamental form. The *luminosity of awareness* is non-positional, non-dual, and without a salient subject-pole, but still phenomenally lived-through in a non-perceptual and thematic fashion. This is compatible with the view that there is no self-experience without world-experience, but only if “self” is understood as some form of lower-tier egocentricity. However, if we wish to say that non-dually lived-through phenomenal awareness should be identified as our higher-tier “Self”, then this entails recognising it as the ineliminable invariant of phenomenality that is without egocentric nature.

This brings me to the next stage of my argument, in which I will show that pure consciousness not only transcends egocentricity, but that it also “transcends” Thompson’s idea of life. Furthermore, I contend that egocentricity and Thompson’s definition of life go hand in hand, neither of which have a place in pure consciousness. Therefore, the non-perceptual type of experience discussed introduces a conceptual discontinuity between (contemplative) mind and life (as defined in Chapter 1).

6.3 Pure Consciousness, Time-Consciousness and Discontinuity

In this section, I will first discuss the implications of pure consciousness for the continental notion of time-consciousness, which is put forward as an account of how consciousness is self-aware in two senses: (i) that consciousness is acquainted with *itself* coherently over time; and (ii) that we have a sense of *self* and *identity* that persists over time (our sense of self has temporal extendedness). I have already discussed the connection of self-awareness to our conscious making-feature and to our phenomenal sense of selfhood. Now I will talk about how (i) and (ii) relate to the continental (philosophical) thesis of inner time-consciousness

and its contemplative (empirical) antithesis, pure consciousness. Second, I will tie this discussion to Thompson's thesis that there is a deep continuity between mind and life, to show that pure consciousness is antithetical to this vision of continuity.

6.3.1 *Self-Awareness and Selfhood: Luminous or Dynamic?*

In Chapter 1, I explained how continental phenomenologists wish to account for self-awareness in terms of the dynamic, threefold structure of time-consciousness: primal impression, retention, and protention. I also explained how continental phenomenologists believe that the structure of time-consciousness requires intentional experience to be operative, and that in this way self-awareness is built into time-consciousness, because it is the implicit, *conscious-making feature* of intentional acts. Therefore, time-consciousness is an account of self-awareness that depends on intentional experience for its existence. This is also true of phenomenal selfhood. Continental phenomenologists contend that there is no self-experience without world-experience. Finally, the structural analysis of time-consciousness serves to account for our temporally extended sense of self.

In contrast, contemplative phenomenologists report that self-awareness – the non-dual acquaintance consciousness has with itself – does not depend for its existence on intentional experience. Pure consciousness is innately luminous and also referred to as “Self” (or else as the immaculate “Mind”, or the innate “Mind”, etc.), but in a qualified sense: it is without egocentricity.

From a continental point of view, the self is intimately linked to time-consciousness, because our awareness of self is built into intentional experience (minimal and proprietary sense of self), which in turn gains temporal extendedness by virtue of partaking in the dynamic process of impression-retention-protention. Zahavi says:

There has been a certain ambiguity in the use of the term phenomenology of self because people have been using the term in two rather different ways. On the one hand, it has just been used synonymously with what is a common sense understanding of self. Others,

including myself, have meant something different, namely the minimal notion of self that phenomenologists have tried to spell out. Of course these two descriptions are rather different. Now if you take the latter description, then what I take phenomenologists to have been trying to articulate is not unrelated to the issue of primal impression-retention-protection because that structure is supposed to be informative of the first-personal presence, and that is precisely what is identified as self.⁴⁸⁸

Zahavi's point is supported by the continental view that time-consciousness is the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness: it is therefore the structural invariant identifiable with selfhood.⁴⁸⁹

There are two points that must be raised against this idea that the self can be spelt out in terms of inner time-consciousness.

First, Dunne asks whether it is coherent to respond to the question, "What is my real self?" by saying, "It is my primal protection-retention."⁴⁹⁰ Dreyfus shares this doubt when he considers the possibility that certain brain activities may one day be discovered to participate in the realisation of the dynamic, threefold structure of inner time-consciousness. He contends that we would still not wish to identify the self with these brain structures.

Second, and more compellingly, the question must be raised whether the dynamic structure of time-consciousness could break down. In this case it would turn out not to be the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness. Thompson actually considers this. He says:

One could say that prereflective self-awareness falls out of and is entailed by inner time-consciousness... [But] we can ask: Can that structure break down?... In Husserl's *Ideas* there is the famous passage where Husserl considers the break down of consciousness so that there is

⁴⁸⁸ Dan Zahavi, "The Reflective Self: Panel Discussion (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008)," and colleagues Evan Thompson, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and John Dunne, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2855932336893877011&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 35:36-36:33.

⁴⁸⁹ Evan Thompson and John Dunne, "The Reflective Self: Panel Discussion (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008)," and colleagues, Georges B.J. Dreyfus and Dan Zahavi, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2855932336893877011&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 37:20-37:30, 55:30-56:00.

⁴⁹⁰ John Dunne, "The Reflective Self: Panel Discussion (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008)," and colleagues Evan Thompson, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, and Dan Zahavi, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2855932336893877011&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 1:00:35-1:00:51.

no longer any consciousness of a continuously existing world with this sense of presencing to self. One way of reading that passage is that Husserl is entertaining the possibility that there could be a break down in the synthesising activity of consciousness that is *so* radical that even that structure would fall apart.. consciousness would become like William James says it is not (in his *Principles of Psychology*): “Consciousness is not like a glow-worm-spark!” However, it is conceivable that there could be a radical breakdown so that there would only be this kind of episodic glow-worm-spark with no temporal synthesis whatsoever - that would be a profound alteration of an invariant...If we take at *face value* certain ways of describing the empirical claim about reflexivity [pure consciousness]...where there is no longer temporal consciousness or temporal synthesis at work, then that would suggest as an empirical claim that there is a kind of consciousness in which that kind of structure is no longer present.⁴⁹¹

In this passage, Thompson considers the possibility that inner time-consciousness may not be the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness. This also challenges the idea that it is an adequate candidate for selfhood, if we want to hold onto the idea that our self is an invariant feature of our very existence.

Pure consciousness is just such a type of experience, which breaks down the dynamic threefold structure of time-consciousness. If we join Thompson in admitting the *prima facie* phenomenological evidence on pure consciousness, which according to Thompson’s own neurophenomenological approach guides and constrains our investigation of consciousness, then we face two options.

First, we are forced to reconsider our definition of selfhood, if we still wish to hold onto the view that our self must be the most basic and invariant feature of our existence. In this case our understanding of (at least) phenomenal selfhood would have to become divorced from egocentricity.

Second, we can maintain an identity relation between selfhood and egocentricity, but this forces us to reject the idea that selfhood is an invariant feature of our existence. Selfhood in this scenario would turn out to be contingent and not a

⁴⁹¹ Evan Thompson, “The Reflective Self: Panel Discussion (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” and colleagues, Georges B.J. Dreyfus, Dan Zahavi, and John Dunne, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2855932336893877011&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 37:25-40:16.

fundamental constituent of (at least) our phenomenal existence because our phenomenal life persists when our self dissolves. This would denote the breakdown of the primal impression-retention-protention structure of temporal consciousness.

Thus pure consciousness has serious implications for a complete account of phenomenal selfhood. Not only does it change our understanding of the self-ego relation, and introduce the possibility of various levels of egocentricity or selfhood, but it also challenges our common sense view that *we in fact are our-selves* and require them for our (phenomenal) life. In this way, the phenomenality of pure consciousness shows that we do not require a salient phenomenal sense of self for phenomonenal life. In the next section, I will show that non-egological, pure consciousness (the contemplative mind) also presents a challenge to Thompson's continuity thesis.

6.3.2 Pure Consciousness and Life

Recall that according to Thompson, (biologically) living systems are dynamically self-organising and cognitive. The self-organising feature is the biological root of identity, which is a group of related processes that represent a salient and operationally closed unity. The operational closure in turn defines a phenomenological domain of interaction (cognition), which determines what is encompassed by the self and what transcends its closure (world).

The same principles are operative on a phenomenological level of selfhood.

In the case of phenomenological selfhood, Thompson has relied on the continental analysis of pre-reflective self-awareness and time-consciousness to articulate the dynamic structure of primal-impression-retention-protention and intentional acts to account for lived systems and phenomenal selfhood.

On this basis, Thompson argues that there is a deep continuity between the living body (*Körper*) and the lived body (*Leib*), or between life and mind. The continuity holds because neurophenomenology can offer a common model to explain both domains. This model is dynamic systems theory.

In this illustration we can see that dynamic systems theory is mapped onto both biology (autopoiesis) and phenomenology (inner time-consciousness). The dynamic processes on both sides of the divide also account for a unified definition of selfhood that is egological

(polarised) and autonomous (self-organising). Dynamic systems theory is therefore the bridging strategy of neurophenomenology.

However, Varela also formulated the “working hypothesis” of neurophenomenology, which we need to re-consider at this point.

Phenomenological accounts of the structure of experience and their counterparts in cognitive science relate to each other through reciprocal constraints.⁴⁹²

By “reciprocal constraints” Varela means that phenomenological analysis of (the structure of) experience should inform scientific research of consciousness, and vice versa.⁴⁹³ This means that precise first-person data constrains analytic and interpretive work on physiological processes.⁴⁹⁴

This is one of the most fundamental methodological insights of neurophenomenology, and the methodological remedy Varela put forward to respond to the hard problem of consciousness. To this end, neurophenomenologists have also turned to contemplative phenomenologists to augment the first-person component of neurophenomenology. Thus neurophenomenology is committed to taking serious *prima facie* evidence derived from

⁴⁹² Francisco J. Varela, “Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy of the Hard Problem,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The “Hard Problem”*, ed. Jonathan Shear (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 351.

⁴⁹³ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 329. For a more detailed explication of what “reciprocal constraints” entail see Antoine Lutz, “Introduction – the explanatory gap: To close or to bridge?” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 328-329; and Antoine Lutz and Evan Thompson, “Neurophenomenology: Integrating Subjective Experience and Brain Dynamics in the Neuroscience of Consciousness,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10:9-10 (2003): 33.

⁴⁹⁴ Antoine Lutz, “Introduction – the Explanatory Gap: To Close or to Bridge?” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 328. Gallagher and Varela suggest that to view phenomenology and the cognitive sciences as mutually constraining is also one way of going about naturalising phenomenology. See Shaun Gallagher and Francisco J. Varela, “Redrawing the Map and Resetting the Time: Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29 (2003): 98.

first-person methods.

Now Thompson's strategy has been to rely on the continental analysis of the structure of inner time-consciousness to establish continuity between mind and life:

However, neurophenomenology is committed to taking into account the phenomenological evidence derived from the contemplative method, which offers a different account of the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness, namely that it is “pure”, “undifferentiated”, “still”, and independent of intentional acts. It is inherently “luminous”, similar to James’ analogy to a glow-worm-spark. Thus the *prima facie*, empirical evidence available from trained contemplative phenomenologists looks like the following:

If “Nph1” cannot be explicated in terms of dynamic systems theory (“Nph2”), then it follows that neurophenomenology cannot rely on the framework of dynamic systems theory to develop common structural levels of description between “Nph1” (phenomenology) and “Nph3” (biology):

I do not intend to convey by this illustration that “consciousness does not equal brain processes”, but that consciousness does not have an analogous pattern of organisation to biologically living systems. Therefore, when we consider the contemplative mind, then it

introduces a strong conceptual discontinuity between the living (life) and the lived (mind).

The luminous nature of awareness (pure consciousness) also transcends Thompson's definition of life, because it is neither dynamically individuated, to give rise to a self and world, nor cognitive – where “cognitive” means relating and interacting with a transcendent environment (however, this does not exclude a kind of cognition that has access to phenomenality itself that is self-contained).

Thus I conclude that the *prima facie* empirical evidence of pure consciousness: (i) falsifies the continental position that inner time-consciousness is the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness; (ii) disallows Thompson to speak of a “deep continuity between life and mind”; and (iii) presents an important feature of consciousness that needs to be considered when engaging in “self-talk”.

6.3.3 *Pure Consciousness and Future Neurophenomenological Research*

I have come to a radical conclusion about the implications of pure consciousness for both continental phenomenology and Thompson's continuity thesis between life and mind. Although this presents a significant challenge to Thompson's project, I think that it actually opens up a promising pathway for his overall work. I will briefly discuss why this is the case, and recommend further research in this direction.

First, the possibility of pure consciousness is indeed a potential defeater for Thompson's attempt to account for continuity between life and mind, because it challenges the theoretical bridging strategy of neurophenomenology (dynamic systems theory). However, I do not think that the neurophenomenological method itself is in any way at question. In fact, I agree with Bayne that the neurophenomenological method is actually “an excellent model of how the science of consciousness ought to proceed”, even though it

cannot shed light on the hard problem of consciousness.⁴⁹⁵ Furthermore, I believe that neurophenomenology is actually a perfect research paradigm to empirically approach the problems I have pointed out.

Second, Thompson is open to the possibility of pure consciousness and even suggests that it might be an empirically tractable question.⁴⁹⁶ Dreyfus and Dunne agree with this.⁴⁹⁷ Let us consider this possibility.

It is conceivable that neurophenomenology can work with individuals who claim to be able to thematically examine pre-reflective self-awareness (enter into states of pure consciousness). The typical strategy would be to frontload phenomenology into the experimental design, and in this way work with the subjects to develop adequate descriptions of their own cognitive contexts. These phenomenological descriptions could then be mapped onto biological processes of the subjects, both in the brain and in the overall physiology beyond the brain. If the experiences of different levels of phenomenal selfhood, their correlating structures of consciousness, and their associated biological processes are correlated with each other, then the extent to which a minimal (bodily) sense of self is present in *pure reflexivity* could be determined.

If we were to discover networks active that realise bodily self-awareness – the experience of being present in the world in an interoceptive and visceral sense – then we would have biological grounds for judging the kind of experience at question to legitimately involve a minimal sense of self. This would support egological views of consciousness.

However, if we would discover something novel that shows no signs of bodily self-

⁴⁹⁵ Tim Bayne, “Closing the Gap? Some Questions for Neurophenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 361.

⁴⁹⁶ Evan Thompson, “The Reflective Self: Panel Discussion (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” and colleagues, B.J. Dreyfus, Dan Zahavi, and John Dunne, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2855932336893877011&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 1:01:50-1:03:48.

⁴⁹⁷ John Dunne and B.J. Dreyfus, “The Reflective Self: Panel Discussion (Recorded at Columbia University on March 1st, 2008),” and colleagues, Evan Thompson and Dan Zahavi, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2855932336893877011&hl=en&emb=1#> (accessed July 31, 2010), min. 35:19-35:30.

awareness (for example, patterns of activity for which we would have to develop new models of description), then the way would be open to make a case for pure consciousness on biological grounds. This would support non-egological views of consciousness.

In this way, a neurophenomenological approach is promising and allows us to conduct research that would be significant for following reasons: (i) it would allow us to adjudicate between continental and contemplative phenomenological accounts of consciousness; (ii) it would allow us to judge whether or not Thompson's continuity thesis should be accepted or discarded on the basis of dynamic systems theory; (iii) it would introduce a new way of examining questions about (phenomenal) selfhood; and (iv) we could re-visit the debates surrounding the Buddhist doctrine of not-self with a new theoretical and *experimental* attitude.

Conclusion

The motivation for neurophenomenology... [is] to gain a deeper understanding of human experience by making contemplative phenomenology a partner in the scientific investigation of consciousness.⁴⁹⁸

Evan Thompson

In this project, I have challenged Thompson's thesis that there is a deep continuity between mind and life from three points of view:

- (1) the nature and potential of first-person approaches to consciousness;
- (2) the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness;
- (3) the egological or non-egological nature of consciousness and selfhood.

In Chapter 1, I offered a methodological theme for my project, namely Varela's and Thompson's neurophenomenological approach to the study of consciousness, which has emerged from the enactive paradigm of cognitive science. To clarify Thompson's position, I outlined his philosophy of biology and life, which entertains the idea that life can be defined in terms of (biologically) living systems and (phenomenologically) lived systems.

According to Thompson, both are autonomous (self-organising) and cognitive (intentional). He also believes that the common reference to the notion of a "body" (living and lived bodies) helps to re-contextualise the relationship between consciousness (mind) and nature (life). Finally, with the help of dynamic systems theory (autopoiesis) and continental phenomenology (time-consciousness), he points out that we can illuminate the biological and the phenomenal domain under one common model of description. Thompson argues that this shows a deep continuity between life and mind.

In Chapter 2, I explored the ground upon which I agree with continental

⁴⁹⁸ Evan Thompson, "Neurophenomenology and Contemplative Experience," in *The Oxford Handbook of Science and Religion*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 227.

phenomenology on the different structures of experience: (i) the objective (intentional) principle of consciousness; (ii) the correlational structure between mind and world; and (iii) the openness of subjectivity, which follows from our subjectivity being intimately coupled to the world. I then discussed two different types of intentionality, one narrow and the other broad, to explain how continental phenomenologists conceive of the relationship between self-awareness and intentional experience. I showed that continental phenomenologists believe that self-awareness requires intentional mental acts for its existence. This in turn supports their thesis that subjectivity is always open; it is at least broadly intentional, and never self-enclosed. Thus, from the viewpoint of continental phenomenology, all of our experience is in some form or another necessarily intentional.

At this point, I left the plateau of consensus with continental phenomenologists. I first outlined two different types of experience, on whose existence I agree with continental phenomenologists: (i) perceptual types of experience, either indogenous (internal) or exogenous (external), with a clear subject-object structure (narrow intentionality); (ii) perceptual types of experience without a clear subject-object structure, which are nonetheless cognitive in a minimal sense, because they remain open and related to the subject's world (otherness).

I then put forward a third type of experience that differs from the above two, which continental phenomenologists deny: a non-perceptual type of experience, with no subject-object structure, in which subjectivity is self-enclosed, worldless, and thus self-determined. I defined such an experience as autonomous, in contrast to the first two types of experience, which are heteronomous (other-determined). The chapters that followed offered good reasons for adopting my view that non-perceptual types of experience do exist, and that we do in fact have cognitive access to them.

In Chapter 3, I discussed first-person methods, by looking at the phenomenological and

contemplative methods as a subspecies of the epoché. I showed: (i) that neurophenomenology is turning to the contemplative method to aid the continental method, because the latter lacks the pragmatic expertise in the epoché to investigate experience directly; (ii) that both the phenomenological method and the contemplative method share a logic; (iii) that professionally trained subjects in contemplative methods have at their disposal cognitive faculties that are more precise and more reliable. This means that attention is a trainable skill, which (iv) means that contemplative phenomenologists are best equipped to examine non-perceptual types of experience.

In Chapter 4, I continued to focus on first-person methods, and considered nine sceptical objections to the claim that first-person methods offer reliable access to our phenomenal life. I responded to the first seven of these objections in the same chapter. I concluded that the phenomenological and contemplative methods I presented in Chapter 3 cannot be equated with the classic understanding of introspection (objection 1). Therefore, the methods considered are not part of a failed project. Contrary to what this objection would make us believe, I showed that we can in fact phenomenologically attend to the intentional domain of consciousness (objection 2); and that such attention is decidedly not unreliable as a method to describe lived-through experience (objection 3).

I then reviewed representationalism to clear the way for a phenomenological view of the mind (and eventually my “Theory of Disclosing” to account for cognitive access of non-perceptual types of experience). This set the stage for me to respond to objections 4, 5, and 6. I showed that the phenomenological method is not solipsistic, because subjectivity is embedded in an independently existing reality (objection 4). This in turn entailed that the epoché does not exclude the world, but attends to it with a more attentive, phenomenological attitude (objection 5).

Next, I responded to the challenge of objection 6: If the objects we intend are merely

internal mental representations, then our mind requires no external world, and this would lead to idealism. Furthermore, an internalist conception of mind may render first-person approaches solipsistic. I responded to this by discussing the distinction between (i) methodological solipsism and (ii) idealism. I followed Husserl to argue that a “pure” (worldless) form of consciousness does not negate an externalist view of the mind. This opened the way to affirm the existence of a pure (worldless) form of consciousness, as well as the human ability to examine it by first-person methods, without falling prey to the criticisms of methodological solipsism or metaphysical idealism.

Finally, I responded to objection 7 by showing that even if meta-awareness alters intentional experience, this does not make it impossible for us to examine lived-through intentional experiences and their intentional subject matter. Therefore, in the case of intentional experience, the impact of observation does not compromise the project of studying conscious experience from a first-person point of view.

In Chapter 5, I responded to objection eight: Can phenomenological reflection reveal the pre-reflective structure of self-awareness without distorting the experience? To respond to this question, I discussed another major methodological issue: the use of higher-order representational theories of mind to clarify the *conscious-making feature* of self-awareness. Here, I refuted such theories on traditional phenomenological grounds. I then discussed the differences between reflective and pre-reflective self-awareness, as well as the difference between reflection and pure reflection. I proposed that cognitive access is a matter of *thematically lived-through acquaintance with our phenomenal life*.

At this point, I left my agreement with continental phenomenology that we can successfully examine perceptual types of experience and offered my non-representational “Theory of Disclosing”. This theory includes non-perceptual types of experience in the class of “observable experiences”.

The fact that we can have first-personal, cognitive access to non-perceptual types of experience has serious consequences for the theoretical framework of continental phenomenology and neurophenomenology. I turned to this in Chapter 6, which fell into five main parts.

First, I focused on a non-perceptual type of experience that can be found in phenomenological accounts of consciousness derived from the contemplative method: the “pure consciousness event”. Its salient features are: (i) that it is conscious *simpliciter*, because (ii) the conscious-making feature of self-awareness persists despite (iii) the absence of intentionality and any temporal or objectified object; and (iv) the state is characterised by an absence of the world, such that the self-aware condition is not determined by it any way (the experience is autonomous; the conscious event is worldless and self-enclosed).

I then showed how contemplative methods take progressive steps to disclose pure consciousness. The steps are:

- (1) to develop *concentration* on an object;
- (2) to cultivate awareness of subjectivity in such a way that the object is *de-emphasised*;
- (3) to de-emphasise subjectivity articulated in terms of an (ego-) “I” located in the past and present (to enhance the access to reflexivity);
- (4) to fully realise the *luminosity* or *awareness* that makes all cognitions possible (the invariant *conscious-making feature*), and in which no elements of subjectivity and objectivity remain in the experience.

I concluded that the above contemplative approach *prima facie* demonstrates that we can have a non-objectifying and thematic acquaintance with awareness itself through a non-perceptual and non-intentional condition.

Second, I proceeded by discussing the significance of this non-perceptual type of experience for our understanding of phenomenal selfhood. The absence of a subject-object

structure affects not only the object-pole of consciousness, but also its ego-pole. To this end, I reviewed egological and non-egological theories of consciousness (whether or not it is meaningful to speak of a subjectless or egoless self-awareness). I then considered the distinction between two levels of egocentricity (selfhood): (i) the *proprietary sense of self* that is present in I-consciousness, which denotes the feeling of ownership of experience; (ii) the *minimal self* or *core self*, which grants consciousness of *oneself* in the sense that one is simply conscious of an experience in its first-personal mode of givenness, and denotes access to our own experiential life.

Third, I questioned the minimal egological stance of consciousness, because it is not harmonious with *pure reflexivity* (pure consciousness) in two senses: (i) pure consciousness lacks even a minimal sense of subjectivity; and (ii) pure consciousness is devoid of intentional mental acts (subject-object structure), but it is still a phenomenal occurrence (it is experienced). Purely *reflexive* self-awareness is thus neither perspectival nor positional, and de-emphasises both object-pole and *ego*-pole.

This means that we have *prima facie* empirical (phenomenological) evidence that we can have cognitive access to a kind of consciousness that is fundamental and non-egological. I concluded: (i) that pure consciousness transcends egocentricity; (ii) that it is meaningful to speak of a subjectless or egoless pre-reflective self-awareness (where “self” denotes the acquaintance that consciousness has with *itself* rather than an ego-identity); (iii) that the notion of a minimal, core self remains unchallenged if we speak about the phenomenal sense of individuated and separate selfhood involved in intentional experience; (iv) that we should add to the proprietary and minimal senses of selfhood a third level, which grants us acquaintance with our lived-through phenomenal life, but without egocentricity (a subject-pole); (v) that this additional level of selfhood enables us to make more sense of the debates surrounding the popular Buddhist doctrine of not-self, where *pure reflexivity* may represent

the fundamental invariant structure of consciousness that the Mahāyāna sometimes refers to as the higher-tier “Self”; (vi) that it is important, in discussing the nature of phenomenal selfhood, to consider different modes of phenomenal givenness active in distinct types of experience.

Fourth, I moved the debate about selfhood and self-awareness to the level of time-consciousness. I reviewed how the self is explicated in the continental tradition via the notion of time-consciousness. I showed that this analysis is challenged by the prospect of pure consciousness, because it is a type of experience that breaks down the dynamic threefold structure of time-consciousness. In this way, pure consciousness presents us with two options: (1) to reconsider our definition of selfhood and phenomenal selfhood, which would have to be separated from egocentricity; (2) to maintain an identity relation between selfhood and egocentricity, which would force us to reject the idea that selfhood is an invariant feature of our existence.

Thompson has relied on time-consciousness to establish his continuity between life and mind, using the primal-impression-retention-protention analysis to establish a similar dynamical mode of description for both the biological and phenomenal domain. The fact that pure consciousness breaks down the dynamic threefold structure of time-consciousness thus also has serious consequences for Thompson’s continuity thesis. Now, however, we see that we have phenomenological evidence (which neurophenomenology is committed to taking seriously) that the *innate mind* (pure consciousness) is decidedly not dynamic and intentional in structure. Therefore, there is a conceptual discontinuity between the domain of the living (open, dynamically self-organising and intentional) and the lived domain of the *immaculate mind* (closed, still, and non-intentional), and between the contemplative mind and life.

Fifth and finally, I completed this project by pointing out that this is actually a promising situation for neurophenomenology. With further research, this approach could (i)

adjudicate between continental and contemplative phenomenological accounts of consciousness; (ii) judge whether or not Thompson's continuity thesis should be accepted or discarded on the basis of dynamic systems theory; and (iii) introduce new ways of examining questions surrounding (phenomenal) selfhood.

In this project I intended to challenge Thompson's thesis that there is a deep continuity between mind and life on from three perspectives:

- (1) the nature and potential of first-person approaches to consciousness;
- (2) the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness;
- (3) the egological or non-egological nature of consciousness and selfhood;

I conclude that *prima facie*:

- (1) first-person methods give us cognitive access to the objective and subjective domain of consciousness;
- (2) continental phenomenology is mistaken about the most fundamental invariant structure of consciousness;
- (3) consciousness qua *awareness per se* is non-egological.

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