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Me and I Are Not Friends, Just Aquaintances: on Thought Insertion and Self-Awareness

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Abstract A group of philosophers suggests that a *sense of mineness* intrinsically contained in the phenomenal structure of all conscious experiences is a *necessary condition* for a subject to become aware of himself as the subject of his experiences i.e. self-awareness. On this view, consciousness necessarily entails phenomenal self-awareness. This paper argues that cases of *delusions of thought insertion* undermine this claim and that such a phenomenal feature plays little role in accounting for the most minimal type of self-awareness entailed by phenomenal consciousness. First, I clarify the main view endorsing this claim i.e. the Self-Presentational View of Consciousness and formulate the challenge from thought insertion. After, I offer a systematic evaluation of all the strategies used by the advocates of this view to deal with this challenge. Finally, I conclude that most of these strategies are unsatisfactory for they rest in unwarranted premises, imprecisions about the agentive nature of cognitive experiences, and especially, lack of distinction between the different ways in which subjects can become aware of their own thoughts.

> The 'subject' is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is
>
> Nietzsche

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1 Introduction

1.1 From a Sense of Mineness to the Subject of Experience

Contrast the experience of believing that it is raining outside and desiring to be at a Brazilian beach drinking a nice caipirinha. Although these two experiences clearly differ in their intentional content and propositional attitude, a group of philosophers claims that they share a common qualitative feature: they are phenomenally given to you as *your own* experiences; they share something called a 'sense of mineness' (Zahavi and Parnas 1998; Zahavi 2005a; Kriegel 2009; Zahavi and Kriegel 2015)[1]. Although its growing popularity, this notion is not easy to grasp. In fact, a number of philosophers are skeptical about its phenomenal reality (Dainton 2004; Bermúdez 1998)[2]. In this context, an important distinction is made between the *metaphysical fact* about mineness and a *phenomenal sense of mineness.* While the former refers to the conceptual fact that all experiences necessarily belong to a subject – the fact that without subjects there would be no experiences at all –, the latter refers to a certain impression that figures in the phenomenology of conscious experiences[3]. The sense of mineness, therefore, concerns the way in which conscious experiences *feel like*. For this specific group of philosophers, the mental states I'm aware of are not only *necessarily* mine, they also *feel as my own* (Gallagher and Zahavi 2014).

An ongoing dispute within philosophy of mind and phenomenological research concerns the role that this sense of mineness plays in shaping certain theories of self-awareness. Recently, some authors have defended a Self-Presentational View of Consciousness – SPV henceforth – that appeals to the sense of mineness to claim that all cases of phenomenal consciousness enjoy an intrinsic type of phenomenal awareness of the subject of experience[4]. This paper deals with this view and the strategies to deal with a specific empirical challenge coming from psychopathology[5].

[1] It is important to note that a number of authors have disputed this idea (Dainton 2004; Schear 2009; López-Silva 2014; Lane 2015; Howell and Thompson 2017; Guillot 2017). A further issue here has to do with the question about whether cognitive states such as beliefs and thoughts enjoy phenomenal character at all (Bayne and Montague 2011). In this paper, I will assume that cognitive states enjoy some form of phenomenal character.

[2] For a helpful summary of this debate, see Howell and Thompson (2017).

[3] This term has received different names in the literature: 'sense of mineness' (Zahavi 2005b); 'for-me-ness' (Zahavi 1999); 'my-ness' (Frith 1992), and 'meishness' (Billon 2013). Zahavi (2005a, 2011) and Grünbaum and Zahavi (2013) use the terms 'mineness' and 'ownership' interchangeably.

[4] The term 'intrinsic' is explicitly meant to distinguish Zahavi's view from *higher-order theories of self-consciousness* (Zahavi 2011, p. 57, note 1).

[5] By the SPV, I refer to the view defended by Dan Zahavi and summarized in 'Subjectivity and Selfhood' (2005a). Other subjectivity theories are 'higher-order theories of consciousness' (Rosenthal 1997; Flanagan 1992), and Kriegel's (2009) 'Self-Representational Theory'. A careful examination of the SPV view seems fairly justified in light of its current influence in disciplines such as psychopathology and psychiatric diagnosis (Parnas et al. 2005), philosophy of mind and cognitive sciences (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008), and developmental psychology research (Zahavi 2005a), just to name a few. It is important to note that no systematic evaluation of all the strategies used by the advocates of the SPV to deal with the challenge from thought insertion is found in current literature. Some authors have treated this issue tangentially and in less specific ways always as a part of broader discussions about the nature of phenomenal consciousness.

1.2 The Self-Presentational View of Consciousness

The notion of *phenomenal character* is fundamental to understand our debate[6]. Such an idea is highly disputed in current philosophy. Those defending an *intentionalistic approach* claim that experiences acquire phenomenal character from the objects they represent. In experiencing a certain object, there is nothing over or above the intentional object of experience; if there is something that is like to taste a glass of wine it is so because of the specific qualitative features of the wine, period (see Tye 1995 for example). Contrasting, the SPV relies on the idea that conscious experiences have a distinctive phenomenal character that is different from the qualities of the intentional objects they represent. The thought is that when aware of a certain object, one is also aware of being in that very state, the awareness of this *experiencing* entailing a distinctive qualitative character over and above the intentional content of experience (Zahavi 2005a, p. 121). This idea allows the advocates of the SPV to make a further distinction between, on the one hand, the qualitative character of an intentional object (*sensed*), and, on the other hand, the qualitative character of the experiential modality through which the object is given (*sensing*) as two phenomenologically inseparable moments of conscious experience (Zahavi 2005a, p. 123). This alleged double phenomenal structure of conscious experience leads people like Dan Zahavi (2005a) to suggest that we should change our way of conceptualizing experiences: 'instead of saying that we experience *representations*, it would be better to say that our experiences are *presentational*, that they *present* the world as having certain features' (p. 120).

One of the most relevant claims made by Zahavi is that the *qualitative character* of experience (what it's likeness) entails *subjective character*. As such, this claim might not sound problematic. However, Zahavi seems to have a rather controversial way of understanding the term. Based on Nagel's (1974) notion of 'what it is like', authors such as Levine (2001) and Kriegel (2009) distinguish between the 'phenomenal character' and the 'subjective character' of conscious experience. The idea is that, in having an experience, there would always be *something that is like for me* to have that experience. While the notion of 'phenomenal character' refers to the 'something that is like' part of the expression, the notion of 'subjective character' refers to the 'for me' part. Now, Zahavi seems to take the notion of 'subjective character' as a type of minimal phenomenal awareness of the subject of experience. In many occasions, Zahavi seems to conflate the notion of phenomenal and subjective character:

> Experiences have a *subjective* 'feel' to them, that is, a certain *phenomenal quality* of 'what it is like' or what it feels like to have them (Zahavi 2005a, p. 116, my emphasis).

[6] Block (1995) formulates the concept of phenomenal consciousness as follows: 'P-consciousness [phenomenal consciousness] is experience. P-conscious properties are experiential properties. P-conscious states are experiential, that is, a state is P-conscious if it has experiential properties' (1995, p. 230).

> Every conscious state, be it a perception, an emotion, a recollection, or an abstract belief, has a certain *subjective character*, a certain *phenomenal quality* of 'what it is like' to live through or undergo that state (Zahavi 2005a, p. 119, my emphasis)

From this move, Zahavi comes to *equate* the notions of subjective character and self-awareness without further argument. This problematic shift can be observed here:

> The notion of pre-reflective self-awareness is related to the idea that experiences have a subjective 'feel' to them, a certain (phenomenal) quality of 'what it is like' or what it 'feels' like to have them. [...] [A]s I live through these differences [experiences], there is something experiential that is, in some sense, the same, namely, their distinct first-personal character. All the experiences are characterized by a quality of mineness or for-me-ness, the fact that it is I who am having these experiences. [...]. All of this suggests [...] that (phenomenal) consciousness consequently entails a (minimal) form of self-consciousness (Gallagher and Zahavi 2014, p. 3)[7].

Zahavi indicates that the quality of *what it is like* is always *what it is like* to be in a certain state *for a subject* and therefore, phenomenal and self-consciousness cannot be distinct phenomena (Zahavi and Kriegel 2015). If there is something that is like to taste a nice Cabernet Sauvignon, it is necessarily something that it is like to be in that state for a *subject*, and this always has a phenomenal reality. Thus, Zahavi (2011) concludes that: 'the question of self-awareness is not primarily a question of a specific what, but of a unique how. It does not concern the specific content of an experience, but its unique mode of givenness' (Zahavi 2005a, p. 204). It is not easy to grasp what the author means by this as the term self-awareness is commonly taken as a state that represents a (phenomenal) self. I take this claim as presenting the idea that there is some kind of phenomenal self-awareness in the way in which experiences are given to us in consciousness. The main problem here is that the step from phenomenal consciousness to self-awareness is neither obvious nor warranted. One thing is to say that phenomenal conscious might lead to different degrees of self-awareness, but quite another is to propose that mere phenomenal access to experiences entails phenomenal awareness of the subject of experience As Zahavi does. One might actually say that phenomenal character *qua* phenomenal character does not necessarily entail self-awareness for they can be instantiated independently. It is possible to think of animals enjoying phenomenal consciousness without necessarily enjoying self-awareness, or at least, the type of self-awareness that Zahavi seems to naturally attribute to phenomenally conscious experiences. Perhaps, one might also think of a possible world where zombie-like entities enjoy phenomenal experiences without enjoying self-awareness, and so on. The point I shall make here is that, given that we can think of phenomenal and self-awareness as distinct phenomena, claiming that the former necessarily entails the latter is a *substantive* thesis that needs to be scrutinized rather than a claim that is naturally

[7] First, it is important to note that the authors use the terms 'self-consciousness' and 'self-awareness' interchangeably. Second, as the discussion goes on, I will show that such a view is populated by a number of conceptual and phenomenological confusions.

entailed by the meaning of the term 'phenomenal consciousness'. In other words, Zahavi is in need of arguing for an extra-premise to link both notions and, as we will see, this will be the source of a number of problems for the SPV.

Zahavi's main argumentation runs as follows: When undergoing a conscious state – drinking a glass of Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon for example – your attention is focused neither on yourself nor on your experience of drinking; you are *immersed* in this conscious episode. However, when asked what are you doing, you quickly reply that you are drinking wine with no further reflection. You do not *discover* that you are drinking wine, nor do you discover that it is you who is drinking; you just *know* what you were doing (in a quite liberal sense of the expression 'to know something'). Zahavi (2005a) explains this by appealing to the existence of two modalities of self-awareness. The most basic form is not something acquired at the moment of being asked what you were doing, but rather, an awareness of yourself that has been pre-reflectively present all along: 'it is because I am *pre-reflectively conscious* of my experiences that I am usually able to respond immediately, that is, without inference or observation, if somebody asks me what I have been doing, or thinking […] prior to the question' (Zahavi 2005a, p. 21, my emphasis). This *pre-reflective self-awareness* refers to a non-conceptual and non-observational experiential awareness of oneself that figures as a subtle presence in all our conscious activities (Zahavi 2005a, pp. 158, 267, 291). Within the SPV, any form of more robust *reflective* self-awareness (such as, let's say, a narrative self-awareness) will be rooted in this subtle acquaintance we have with our conscious experiences that is claimed to be prior to any attentional move towards them.

A stronger claim made by the SPV is that the *sense of mineness* is a *necessary condition* for all experiences to enjoy this type of phenomenal awareness of their subject. Zahavi (2005a) claims that a careful examination of our conscious experiences reveals the fact that they are always given to me as *my own* experiences; they are fundamentally characterized by an intrinsic *sense of mineness* (pp. 124–132), and it is in virtue of this that one can claim that all experiences involve phenomenal awareness of their subject. So to speak, the sense of mineness *reveals* the subject of experience, and given that all experiences enjoy a sense of mineness, all experiences enjoy phenomenal access to their subject. Borrowing Billon's (2016) classification, the SPV takes a *universalist* stance towards the presence of a sense of mineness in conscious experience; As Zahavi & Kriegel (p. 1) indicate: 'the for-me-ness of experience is a universal feature of experience'. Finally, the SPV *identifies* the phenomenal sense of mineness with a minimal and phenomenal form of self-awareness that is intrinsically contained in all conscious experiences, as explicitly claimed by Zahavi (2005a): 'it is also possible to identify this pre-reflective sense of mineness with a minimal, or, core, [phenomenal] sense of self' (Zahavi 2005a, p. 125).

Now, as suggested by Howell and Thompson (2017), one of the main critical issues underlying Zahavi's argumentation is that it relies on exhortations to introspection and phenomenological reflections. Problematically, we all know that the phenomenology of our different mental states can be influenced by a number of top-down beliefs and other background mental states, this leaving room to serious doubts about the very existence of a sense of mineness as an intrinsic phenomenal feature of conscious experience rather than as a mere product of top-down introspective influence. In what follows, I will assume that it is possible to identify a sense of mineness in, at least, certain normal experiences. However, I will remain silent about

the nature (reflective, pre-reflective, etc.), production, and architecture (top-down, bottom-up, etc.) of this feature.

2 Framing the Challenge

2.1 Modalities of Phenomenal Awareness of Thoughts

Discussions concerning the sense of mineness are replete with conceptual and phenomenological inaccuracies. Before formulating the challenge from thought insertion, I shall offer a framework to make sense of the different ways in which subjects can become aware of their own thoughts. This section comes to complement the work by Guillot's (2017) and will be useful to understand the main flaws of Zahavi's strategies to deal with this challenge.

The most fundamental way in which one can become aware of a thought is by simply having direct phenomenal access to it i.e. as a mental state that one is simply undergoing. Usually, this modality of awareness is accompanied by a *sense of privacy* and *exclusivity* i.e. the idea that the way I access to my own thoughts is exclusive in the sense that others cannot access to them in the same way. The idea here is that *there is something that is like for me* to experience thoughts and it is in this sense that I cannot be wrong about whose thoughts they are; they are my thoughts because I am the one undergoing them. Period. This seems to be the most primitive modality of phenomenal awareness of thoughts. Guillot calls this 'for-me-ness'. Although this modality reflects the most basic way of understanding the first-person perspective, at the same time, here phenomenal subjectivity as such does not seem to be an issue yet. For-me-ness is well reflected in those moments of total immersion in our everyday activities when the object of awareness is just the experience. Think about the case when you get immersed into a musical melody so you loose awareness of yourself and become one with the musical flow. To put it in Sartrean way, in this moment the question about subjectivity seems to disappear and all that is given to you is the experience. Here, phenomenal availability does not seem to include any type of phenomenal awareness of the subject of experience (phenomenal self-awareness). It might exist as part of the background knowledge of the actual subject of the experience, but it does not follow from this that it is a phenomenal type of awareness.

A second modality of awareness of thoughts concerns the thought itself and its subject. Guillot calls this 'my-ness' although we might also call it 'sense of subjectivity' as, in my opinion, it represents the first moment in which subjectivity becomes a phenomenal issue. This modality captures the moment when *we feel that a thought is given to us*, perhaps, in no specific way, but just given to us. This modality refers to the awareness we have of simply being the subjects undergoing certain thoughts or ideas. The sense of subjectivity or my-ness needs to be distinguished from another modality of awareness of thought that has been often called *sense of ownership* or *mineness*. This modality involves an awareness of the thought, the subject of the thought, and an awareness of the type of relationship standing between these two. It refers to the awareness of a thought given to me *as* my own (see Zahavi and Parnas 1998; Zahavi 2011; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). Now, it is important to mention that there is another basic way of making sense of the awareness of the relationship between a thought and its subject. This fourth modality refers to the awareness of a thought as something that has been created or initiated by the subject. In

order to avoid any explanatory commitment, I shall call 'agentive mineness' to the modality referring to the awareness of an agentive relationship between the thought and its subject. It is important to note that neither for-me-ness nor subjectivity entail a sense of mineness. The phenomenology of delusions of thought insertion will provide prima facie evidence for this (I will deal with this issue in the next section).

Finally, I shall note the fact that one can become aware of one's thoughts as occurring in a certain place, for example 'my head'. I shall call this 'sense of location' or 'where-ness'. For many, this feature might sound too obvious, but it is not. The sense of location seems to be a highly variable feature of the phenomenology of thoughts (seeming to affect the normal sense of privacy attached to normal thinking as well). For example, people from some tribes in China experience rationally produced thoughts in their chest and not in 'the head' like in western cultures. The idea about the variability of the sense of location is reinforced by the phenomenology of a number of psychopathological experiences. In 'thought withdrawal' psychotic patients experience some of their thoughts not longer located in their heads but being removed by external agents (Schneider 1959; Koehler 1979); Episodes of psychotic telepathy include the experience of having phenomenal access to thoughts that are located in someone else's head (Greyson 1977), and cases of 'thought broadcasting' involve patients experiencing their own thoughts as escaping silently from their mind/head and being broadcasted to other people (Pawar and Spence 2003, p. 288). These cases offer prima facie reasons to claim that the sense of location can be a variable feature of the way we become aware of our own thoughts.

2.2 The Challenge from Thought Insertion

Should we think about the sense of mineness as part and parcel of the explanation for the most minimal form of self-awareness entailed by phenomenal consciousness as Zahavi proposes? I think we should not. This is not denying that there is a subjective dimension to phenomenal consciousness, rather, − against Zahavi – that an experiential sense of mineness (or ownership) plays little role in accounting for its most minimal form. It is certainly plausible to think about the phenomenal subjectivity of consciousness and the sense of mineness as completely distinct phenomena so the task is to demonstrate whether they can actually come apart phenomenologically. Here, the analysis of the phenomenology of delusions of thought insertion – TI henceforth – in light of the framework offered in section 2 becomes crucial[8]. Patients suffering from TI report that certain *thoughts* or *ideas* are placed into their minds by external agents of different kind (Mellor 1970; Mullins and Spence 2003). This is a classic report:

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

[8] It might be suggested that TI is a challenge for all subjectivity theories of consciousness. Although I agree with this claim, for the sake of specificity and clarity, here I shall examine only the way in which this phenomenon undermines Zahavi's argumentation.

What patients seem to be implying in these cases is that certain thoughts that appear in their own stream of consciousness *are not experienced as their own thoughts,* and the best explanation for this seems to be that, while these thoughts retain for-me-ness and a sense of subjectivity, they lack a sense of mineness. This suggestion is supported by the following report:

> Patients report that ... the *thoughts which occur in their heads [are] not actually their own*. It is as if another's thoughts have been ... inserted in them. One of our patients reported physically feeling the alien thoughts as they entered his head and claimed that he could pin-point the point of entry! (Cahill and Frith 1996, p. 278, my emphasis)

Metzinger (2003) has suggested that TI demonstrates that the sense of mineness is 'by no means a precondition of conscious experience' (p. 334) for it shows self-aware subjects alienated from their own thoughts for which they experience neither a sense of mineness nor a sense of agency (agentive mineness in my framework). Cases of TI make phenomenologically plausible the idea that conscious experiences without a sense of mineness can occur in self-aware subjects, and this is enough to suggest that such an experiential requirement is not really needed to explain the most basic type of phenomenal subjectivity entailed by phenomenal consciousness as Zahavi proposes. In these cases, subjects seem to be aware of thoughts given to them not as theirs, but as someone else's (this last element being supported by the external attribution characterizing the symptom). Explicitly referring to the SPV, Metzinger (2006, p. 3) proposes that TI shows that the sense of mineness is not 'an invariant dimension of the first personal givenness', which it is something I agree with. TI cases might favour a moderate stance towards the presence of the sense of mineness in conscious experiences.

At first glance, it seems plausible to conclude here that, contrary to what the SPV argues, TI shows that it is possible to retain phenomenal awareness of the subject of experience without experiencing certain experiences as *my own experiences.* Therefore, the sense of mineness should not be taken as part and parcel of the explanation for the most minimal subjectivity entailed by phenomenal consciousness. However, things are not so straightforward and as a result of the challenge from TI, advocates of the SPV have elaborated some replies. The following section is devoted to a systematic evaluation of all these replies.

3 Evaluating the SPV

3.1 Thought Insertion as a Disruption in the Sense of Mental Agency

The first strategy to defend the SPV consists in claiming that TI patients are aware of thoughts that retain a sense of mineness but lack agentive mineness[9]. Zahavi (2005a)

[9] This reply has been formulated in slightly different style in Zahavi (2005a, b), and Grünbaum and Zahavi (2013).

formulates this reply in a bottom-up fashion. The idea is that the phenomenology of normal thinking is accompanied by a first-order *phenomenal sense of agency* i.e. the phenomenal impression of being the author of a certain thought. The presence of this sense of agency would be the main condition for a subject to become aware of a thought as its author (agentive mineness)[10]. Zahavi (2005a) argues that: 'when schizophrenics assert that their thoughts are not theirs, they do not mean that they themselves are not having the thoughts, but, rather someone else has inserted them and that they, *themselves, are not responsible for generating it*' (p. 144, my emphasis). Explicitly replying to Metzinger's objection, Zahavi (2005b) claims that: 'rather than involving a lack of a sense of ownership, passivity phenomena like thought insertions involve a lack of a sense of authorship (or self-agency) and a misattribution of agency to someone or something else' (Zahavi 2005b, p. 6). As we can see, the strategy is rather straightforward. Zahavi offers a re-interpretation of TI that is meant to save his argumentation; when schizophrenics claim that their thoughts are not their own, they do not express that they are not the subjects of that experience, but rather that a certain thought present in their stream of consciousness has not been *produced* by them (Zahavi 2005b). This reply is problematic in a number ways:

First, Zahavi's reply cannot discriminate between the particular phenomenology of TI and the phenomenology of other cognitive experiences that can also be explained in terms of a disruption in the sense of agency and a retained sense of mineness. Further, it cannot explain the external attributions that patients make i.e. the mark *par excellence* of the symptom. Take the case of unbidden thoughts; those thoughts that suddenly pop into our stream of consciousness, striking us 'unexpectedly out of the blue' (Frankfurt 1976, p. 240). Although we cannot identify any impression of agency in their occurrence, unbidden thoughts are not externalized. Now, think about *obsessive thoughts.* They usually appear in our consciousness against our own will and with highly *ego-dystonic* contents. Again, although we cannot identify any experiential sense of agency in their occurrence, they are not externalized in any way (Cermolacce et al. 2007; López-Silva 2014). When observing these gaps in Zahavi's first reply, it seems plausible to maintain that what justifies the patients reports is not a mere lack of agentive mineness, but rather, a more fundamental disruption in the sense of mineness. The best way to make sense of the phenomenological differences between obsessive and unbidden thoughts with inserted thoughts is to suggest that both obsessive and unbidden thoughts retain a sense of mineness, while inserted thoughts do not. In fact, it is virtually impossible to explain the specific character of TI without appealing to a disruption in the sense of mineness. One of the advantages of this interpretation is that it nicely explains what makes patients to attribute the abnormal thought to an external agent. Given that thoughts are not *given to me as mine,* the subject's mind might try to find an explanatory closure by externalizing those thoughts. About this, a clear weakness in Zahavi's reply is that it does not consider the context in which TI emerges. Delusions of TI are usually adopted in the context of a number of perceptual (Jaspers

[10] Campbell (1999a, b) formulates the idea of agentive mineness in a top-down fashion, namely, as the product of a retrospective explanatory judgement about the occurrence of thoughts. On this view, there is no phenomenal sense of mental agency attached to the fundamental phenomenology of thoughts.

1963; López-Silva 2016), affective (Gibbs 2000; Payne 2013), and cognitive impairments. As the patient DF comments:

> In the months preceding it [episode of thought insertion], I experienced unreality many times. I had short periods of time in which I felt like I didn't exist. I had other experiences in which I had to, for instance, touch a coffee table in front of me to make sure it was real. I had short times in which nothing outside myself seemed to exist (Unpublished interview).

In this context, there are good reasons to think that all these alterations plus a lack of sense of mineness might prone subjects to externalize certain thoughts (López-Silva 2015). This suggestion in supported by empirical studies in clinical psychiatry that conclude that: 'the sense that emotional experiences are out of one's personal control my prompt a search for meaning that may find explanations in terms of external influence' (Marwaha et al. 2014, p. 6), idea that is entirely consistent with the case of TI.

Second, Zahavi's reply assumes an implausible picture of the normal phenomenology of thoughts. Zahavi (2005a, p. 143) takes thoughts to be normally experienced as something that one is doing, i.e. as involving a sense of agency just like in cases of motor actions (see also Gallagher 2014, p.2). This experiential sense of agency would be missing in cases of TI while the sense of mineness would be preserved. However, the truth is that not even normal thoughts are accompanied by a phenomenal impression of mental agency so the reply is based on an unsound idea. This misleading picture comes from the author's lack of specific treatment of the issue about mental agency *as distinct* from the discussion about bodily agency[11]. Although the clauses that some people sometimes use to refer to their own thoughts might make them look like something deliberate, the actual appearance of thoughts in our field of phenomenal awareness is passive. Even when you are trying to solve a puzzle, the final answer to it pops into your stream of consciousness in a passive way; it is not felt as a willful generation of thoughts. So to speak, thoughts appear in our stream of consciousness like dandelions so the phenomenology of thoughts should be characterized as fundamentally passive. If this is right and even the normal phenomenology of thought does not include an experiential sense of agency, Zahavi's reply is untenable.

Third, Zahavi's reply seems to ignore what patients actually report. TI patients do not refer to alien thoughts as not being something *created* by them, they clearly refer to them as something that does *not feel as their own*, they explicitly deny any awareness of a sense of mineness. As one of Jaspers' patients (Jaspers 1963) report:

> I have never read nor heard them; they come unasked; I do not dare to think I am the source but I am happy to know of them without thinking them. They come at

[11] Usually, the author equates the phenomenology of thoughts with the phenomenology of motor actions. Zahavi (2005a, p 143) claims that: 'the sense of agency refers to the sense of being the author or *source of an action or thought* (Zahavi 2005a, p. 143, my emphasis).

> any moment like a gift and I do not dare to impart them as *if they were my own* (my emphasis, p. 123).

Here, Zahavi might be confusing the actual phenomenology of TI with a potential explanation for it. Perhaps, the lack of recognition of a sense of mineness might be based on the malfunction of certain sub-personal mechanisms related to the agentive architecture of normal thinking. However, what it is phenomenologically referred by TI patients is not a lack of agentive mineness, but rather, a lack of a sense of mineness. When putting aside prior conceptual commitments (such as Zahavi's view on the necessary role of the sense of mineness in the explanation of the subjectivity of consciousness), we should insist that cases of TI show that it is phenomenologically possible to preserve the subjective character of conscious experiences without these experiences enjoying a sense of mineness.

3.2 Sense of Mineness via Sense of Location

The second strategy used by Zahavi consists in claiming that the patients' ability to locate the alien thought in *their own stream of consciousness* entails the retention of an experiential sense of mineness for the stream. As Grünbaum and Zahavi (2013) claim, the retention of a sense of mineness here: 'has to do with a thought simply appearing in "my stream of consciousness"' (p. 225)[12]. Zahavi (2005a) claims that: 'one should, however, not overlook that the subjects of thought insertions *clearly recognize* that they are the subjects in whom the alien episodes occur. They are not confused about *where* the alien thoughts occur; they occur in the patient's own mind' (p. 144, my emphasis). In a slightly different style, Grünbaum and Zahavi (2013) conclude that:

> When a subject who experiences thought insertions or delusions of control reports that certain thoughts are not his thoughts, that someone else is generating these thoughts, he is also indicating that these thoughts are present, not 'over there' in someone else's head, *but within his own stream consciousness, a stream of consciousness for which he claims ownership* (p. 235, my emphasis)

There are a number of problems with this reply; the first one is that it clearly conflates the notions of *for-me-ness* with the notion of *sense of mineness*. In fact, the whole SPV's argumentation shows this confusion. While a sense of mineness refers to the experience of a certain mental state *as my own mental state*, for-me-ness refers to having phenomenal access to certain mental states as states that one is simply undergoing, i.e. states that are happening in my subjective field of awareness. The idea here is that *there is something that is like for me to experience phenomenally available mental states* and it is in this sense in which I cannot be wrong about whose mental

[12] The authors attribute this idea to Campbell's (Campbell 1999a, b) proposal. However, the idea of mineness defended by Campbell does not seem to be consistent with the one defended by the self-presentational approach. In fact, Campbell (1999a, b) claims something quite different: 'What makes my occurrent thoughts mine is not just that they show up in my stream of consciousness. What makes them mine is, in addition, the fact that they are product of my long-standing beliefs and desires, and that the occurrent thinking can affect the underlying state' (621).

states these are. In his general argumentation, Zahavi claims that every phenomenally available mental state is experientially given to me *as my own mental state* (sense of mineness, see, Zahavi 2005a). However, this is just not true. Experiencing a mental state as something that one is simply undergoing is quite different from experiencing a certain mental states *as my own mental state* and Zahavi conflates these two notions (against what TI patients suggest). The former does not entail the latter and Zahavi seems to neglect this subtle, but quite important, phenomenological distinction. Here, Zahavi again is in need of arguing for an extra premise to link these two modalities of awareness. However, he offers none.

Cases of TI seem to show that a subject can be subjectively aware of a thought without feeling this thought as her own thought, i.e. without feeling a sense of mineness towards it, yet, retaining a sense of subjectivity and for-me-ness. What TI shows is that phenomenal access does not entail mineness in the way Zahavi suggests so in this context to insist that every experience is not only *given to me,* but rather, necessarily *given to my as my own experience* becomes question begging. TI patients are phenomenally aware of an alien thought that does not feel as theirs: 'the subject experiences thoughts which are not his own intruding into his mind. The symptom is not that he has been caused to have unusual thoughts, but that the thoughts themselves are not his' (Wing et al. 1974; also see Mullins and Spence 2003). Indeed, one of the most puzzling aspects of this delusion is that some phenomenally available thoughts occurring within the subject's stream of consciousness are not felt as being the subject's own thoughts (Bortolotti and Broome 2009). If anything, TI shows that certain thoughts lack the alleged sense of mineness and therefore, that this sense, as an experiential component of conscious experiences, plays little role in the explanation of the subjectivity of consciousness, at least, in the one preserved in these psychotic cases. A further issue here is that part of the conflicting nature of this symptom is exactly given for the fact that patients become aware of thought that do not feel as their own! Insisting in the retention of a sense of mineness would end up in an odd interpretation of the patients' reports, namely, <I'm aware of a thought as my own but not as my own because is someone else's>. Here, the framework offered in section 3 helps to make better sense of the symptom: <I'm aware of a thought (for-me-ness) given to me (sense of subjectivity – my-ness) not as my own, but rather, as someone else's (lack of sense of mineness) > .

A second worry concerns the notion of stream of consciousness that underlies Zahavi's reply. The author defends the retention of a sense of mineness in cases of TI by claiming that alien thoughts are still the patients' own thoughts because they claim them to be in *their own c*of location (Gallagher 2004, 2012; Zahavi 2005a; Grünbaum and Zahavi 2013). The idea here is that that thoughts are my own because they *feel* as given in *my* own stream of consciousness or 'in my mind' (see quote above). Thus, the claim is that I feel that I own the location or space in which those phenomenally available thoughts are given to me. This view implausibly formulates the sense of mineness in terms of location, as if the stream of consciousness were a bucket where certain mental states are contained. In fact, this suggestion only entails for-me-ness as it refers to a subject simply having phenomenal access to a thought. However, phenomenal access is not sufficient for a thought to be phenomenally own by the subject.

Now, the claim might entail some degree of sense of subjectivity as the thought is located in *my* stream, so it is given to me but, again, this does not entail a sense of

mineness as the relevant thought lacks the property of being given to me *as my own thought.* A suggestion here is that, rather than thinking of the stream of consciousness as the location of a thought, it is more plausible to think of it as the way in which we represent the occurrence of phenomenally available thoughts, or, as the way in which phenomenally conscious episodes simply occur. This issue is often referred as the *unity of consciousness* and all what it entails is that, when I focus my attention to them, phenomenally available experiences seem to be given as in an unified stream (Bayne and Chalmers 2003; Bayne 2010). However, this implies neither that mental states are experientially given to me as in *my own* stream nor that one has direct experiential access to this stream as the location of one's thoughts[13]. Arguably, here the category 'my own stream' seems to require a further inferential step of the type: 'These experience are given as in a stream; I only have one stream of consciousness, and that stream is my own' (see Vosgerau and Voss 2014, p. 535). Thus, the notion of stream of consciousness would be related to the role of attention in organizing phenomenally available experiences. This implies the idea that we do not have a full experience of the stream of consciousness as such, as Zahavi's reply seems to require as for a subject to be able to claim an experiential sense of mineness for it. One thing is to say that mental states I phenomenally access are given *as in a stream* when I focus my attention on them, but quite another is to say that those experiences are given to me *as in an stream that feels as my own*. One does not seem to have direct phenomenal access to one's stream of consciousness as such; rather, our phenomenally available experiences are represented to us as in a stream.

Another problem in this second reply is that it establishes the retention of a sense of mineness by applying a problematic shift. First, it is clear that the alien thought necessarily *occurs* in the patient's stream of consciousness, otherwise she would not be aware of it. This is what I have called for-me-ness (what is not clear is whether we can really say that this stream is given to me as my own as Zahavi's quote seem to entail). However, we cannot equate both the inserted thought and the stream of consciousness where the thought 'is given' as Zahavi does. Here, the retention of the sense of mineness is established by changing the target phenomenon from 'thought' to 'stream of consciousness'. However, this move is neither sufficiently justified nor obvious. The problem is that Zahavi defends the retention of the sense of mineness by changing the target explanandum from 'thought' to 'stream of consciousness'. This explanatory shift in Zahavi's argumentation cannot save the SPV from the challenge proposed by TI because, if we retain the target explanandum, we should retain the interpretation of the phenomenon as a case where subjects are aware of themselves having phenomenal access to a thought that lack a sense of mineness.

The final problem with this second reply is that it does not really show the presence of an experiential sense of mineness in the patients' reports. Zahavi (2005a, p. 144) suggests that patients '*clearly recognize'* that the alien thoughts belong to them because they are the subjects in whom the alien episode occurs. First, here we observe again the confusion between a for-me-ness, sense of subjectivity, and sense of mineness. Second, we have already ruled out the option of retention of the sense of mineness via location in the stream of consciousness. Third, we can still suggest that what is retained is for-me-ness and a sense of subjectivity, and that the sense of

[13] It is important to note that no-direct-access does not imply no-access at all.

mineness is missing. This is because Zahavi's claim can be better interpreted as referring to an operation occurring at the level of attributions rather than referring to an actual experience of mineness. Here, there might be a rational recognition of the fact of mineness. Even if I don't feel a sense of mineness, I can still have access to the knowledge that those thoughts are *necessarily* mine. However, it does not follow from this that such recognition is phenomenal. It is perfectly plausible to claim that I can recognize that P without having the actual experience of P. Zahavi seems to overlook the fact that self-attributions can be reached through judgements not necessarily grounded in first-order experiential information (Stephens and Graham 2000). From this point of view, an attribution of mineness would not necessarily involve a phenomenal sense of mineness.

Further, we can hypothesize that the element that plausibly explains the bizarre nature of TI is the very mismatch between the patient's background assumptions about the world and his own mental life and the way the world and his own mental life actually feel like. This suggestion is entirely consistent with a broader phenomenological picture of psychosis that Zahavi's seems to overlook. Psychotic patients usually report a conflict between *things they know that have to be the case* and the way *things feel*. As De Haan and De Bruin (2010), p. 385) observe:

> First-onset schizophrenic patients often report that although they know that it is their body that is moving and realize that it must be their thought– after all, it is going on in their mind! – the utterly disturbing experience is that it just does not feel that way.

A high number of psychotic patients tend to show a conflict between what they know about the world and the way the world feels like. One patient suggests that: 'I know it cannot be true. That would be nuts. But I feel that way' (De Haan and De Bruin 2010, p. 385). Psychotic patients show important discrepancies between the way they feel certain experiences and what they know it has to be the case. This discrepancy seems to be one of the main sources of the conflicting character that pervades psychotic reports. In psychosis, the experience at the sense level and the knowledge at the attributional level run contrary to each other and Zahavi's reply does not to consider this. The claim that patients 'recognize' or 'acknowledge' that thoughts are their own does not guarantee the retention of an experiential *sense* of mineness in cases of TI because patients might reach this recognition in virtue of an attributional move.

4 Concluding Remarks

The SPV suggests that phenomenal consciousness always involves phenomenal awareness of the subject of experience through the presence of an intrinsic sense of mineness in all conscious experiences. In this paper I have disputed this claim by appealing to cases of thought insertion. This delusion seems to show patients aware of thoughts that are given to them not as their own thoughts, but rather, as someone else's. TI seems to demonstrate that a sense of mineness plays little role explaining the most minimal form of subjectivity entailed by phenomenal consciousness. I have

also systematically evaluated the strategies used by the main advocate of the SPV – Dan Zahavi – to deal with TI and there are good reasons to conclude that all these strategies are unsatisfactory for they rest in unwarranted premises, imprecisions about the agentive nature of cognitive phenomenology, and, especially, confusions about the ways in which subjects can become aware of their own thoughts. The main weakness of Zahavi's argumentation is that it does not distinguish between the notions of for-me-ness, subjectivity (my-ness), and sense of mineness as different modalities of awareness of thoughts. If we distinguish between these different notions, TI can be interpreted as a cognitive experience that enjoys for-me-ness, subjectivity, but no sense of mineness. In consequence, we should not think about the sense of mineness as a necessary condition for a person to become self-aware as suggested by the SPV. This is not to say that the sense of mineness plays no role in making sense of, perhaps, other non-psychotic forms of subjectivity. Although a certain form of subjectivity is always preserved in psychosis, subjectivity as such is importantly diminished in these cases. Perhaps, a phenomenal sense of mineness plays an important role in making sense of less fundamental forms of self-awareness such as narrative or social self-awareness. The main issue is that, in light of the offered examination and the flaws in Zahavi's replies, it is not entirely clear what role this might be. The specific role of an experiential sense of mineness in the task of understanding the different forms of human self-awareness remains an open question [14]. Finally, TI makes possible to propose a distinction between two kinds of conscious experiences. On the one hand, *fully-owned experiences* would be those that enjoy for-me-ness, a sense of subjectivity, and a sense of mineness (as in most normal cases). On the other hand, *plain phenomenal experiences* would be those that enjoy for-me-ness, but show some degree of absence of the sense of subjectivity, as those that certain psychotic reports seem to instantiate. Certainly, this often-overlooked distinction seems to be crucial when trying to understand the link between phenomenal consciousness and self-awareness. Perhaps, such a task is so difficult to pursue mostly because, as the song says, 'me and I are not friends, just acquaintances'.

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[14] Independent evidence against the main claims of the SPV comes from the phenomenology of Cotard's syndrome and depersonalization. These symptoms can be explained as experiences that retain for-me-ness but lack subjectivity and sense of mineness. For reasons of extension I cannot deal in depth with these cases, for a more specific treatment see: Billon (2016), and Guillot (2017).

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