



Reply to Zahavi: The Value of Historical Scholarship

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Let me begin by focusing on the long list of agreements between the Dan Zahavi and me. As he is such a careful and scholarly author, there are almost no misunderstandings to get out of the way first.

At the beginning of section 2, there is a conflation of different concepts of possibility. If we grant that imaginability is conceivability (in the sense of being describable without any logical contradictions), if we pass over “practical” possibility as a non-defined term, and grant that by “physically” possible Zahavi very likely means “nomologically” possible, it still would present a major step to say that something is conceptually *or* (my emphasis) metaphysically possible. Not everything that is logically or conceptually possible is metaphysically possible as well—metaphysically possible worlds (just like nomologically possible worlds) have to be interpreted as a subset of logically possible worlds. *How* this can be done is a subject of intense and highly technical debates in current philosophy of mind. We cannot possibly enter this debate here, but let me just point out how, for instance, Zahavi’s remarks in the second paragraph of page 4 rest on a conflation between nomological and logical possibility.

A second misunderstanding, traditionally and typically reiterated by phenomenologists, is the rhetorical question of whether pathology can actually reveal something fundamental about the deep structure of normal experience. Neurophenomenological case studies are simply instruments in the search for a functionalist theory of mind. The aim is not to make sweeping claims about the structure of non-pathological experience, but to isolate distinct *causal roles*, to find double dissociations—to investigate which forms of phenomenal content are independent of each

other and can exist in isolation—and thereby to gradually uncover the functional architecture of the conscious mind. This is a well-introduced methodology, not only in philosophy of mind, but in neuropsychology and related disciplines as well. It simply has nothing to do with scientistic ideology or the attempt to “simply” draw “unqualified conclusions about normal cases” (p. 5). The more interesting observation is how phenomenologists keep reiterating this shallow misunderstanding—they could make a greater contribution by investigating which aspects of the conscious mind might be systematically immune to this type of empirically informed functional analysis. This, however, is already being done—by analytical philosophers.

Zahavi also discovered an important linguistic error in BNO (p. 455, see p. 7). What I actually wanted to say is that the autophenomenological reports of Cotard patients—double bookkeeping and all—should still be seen as *sincere* reports, even if they cannot be *truthful* on logical grounds. I am grateful to him for pointing out this mistake. At the beginning of section 3, he reiterates the old “illusion misunderstanding” I already drew attention to in my reply to Gallagher, just as he does in a number of places in his recent book (e.g., p. 103). I explained why this metaphor contains a logical mistake on the last page of BNO. Mineness has nothing to do with Heidegger’s “Jemeinigkeit” (p. 9), consciousness as such certainly does not have the quality of “being-in-the-world” (p. 10), the philosophical position of scientific realism certainly is not the same as the primitive ideology of “unrestrained scientism” (p. 16), and so on—but arguably, these are just minor points. On the contrary, it is striking to see how many points of agreement between Zahavi and me there actually are. Let me name some of them.

Yes, I agree that philosophers like Hume and even literary authors like Friedrich Nietzsche have made claims with regard to the self that superficially resemble my own. The question, however, is not so much what their claims were, but which *arguments* they used. I agree with Zahavi that the history of philosophy is one of the most important subdisciplines in the field. In order to realize its epistemic potential for current systematic debates in philosophy of mind, however, it must be reconstructed as a history of *arguments*, not as a history of claims. Good historical scholarship should not consist in creating a stamp collection, but in making epistemic progress visible. I also agree with Zahavi’s doubts about the ultimate usefulness of thought experiments: designing logically possible worlds is a fantastic tool for sharpening philosophical debates, making implicit background assumptions explicit. The problem, however, is twofold: first, ever new and more subtle implicit background assumptions determine such scenarios, and second, it is a principled problem whether any epistemic progress with regard to the *actual* world can be made by investigations that are not data-driven. On the other hand, I also fully agree that the theoretical impact of an empirical case study is not easily determined, and I also agree that I most certainly underestimated the difficulty associated with taking the phenomenology of pathological cases seriously (p. 5). I agree with Zahavi’s differentiation between ownership and agency (although I would have wanted to know what the *conceptual* relationship between the two properties is). I also believe that it might have been better to present an explicit series of case studies of schizophrenia in order to take a closer look at the relationship between cognitive agency and the phenomenological claim that inserted thoughts are actually experienced by the schizophrenic as appearing in his *own* mind (p. 6). As mentioned in my reply to Gallagher, I wholeheartedly agree with Zahavi that it is most certainly wrong to interpret

delusions as a type of ordinary belief that merely happens to be false (p. 7)—a number of good positive ideas can be found in Gerrans 2000. Zahavi is right in pointing out that my own phenomenological approach to psychopathology in BNO most certainly was much too simplistic and facile. I look forward to learning more about the precise conceptual progress presented by Minkowski, Binswanger, Tatossian, Tellenbach, Blankenburg, or Zahavi, as they could make valuable contributions to the current debate. Finally, I also agree that there are many different concepts of the self in the current debate (p. 8). In the series of literary authors and the beautiful phenomenological poetry Zahavi quotes, I am most grateful to him for drawing my attention to a beautiful sentence by Michel Henry (p. 9), which I find very inspiring in the context of the different notions of internality I developed in BNO. I also like many of the poetic metaphors Zahavi introduces himself, like the “invariant dimension of first-personal givenness” (p.10). Having grown up in the country of Brentano, Husserl, and Heidegger, I agree with Zahavi that most philosophical phenomenology I have encountered was actually a dressed-up form of folk psychology (p. 12). Historical scholarship is important, and Dan Zahavi is certainly an excellent example of it. But where is the positive, *systematic* contribution of German phenomenology to the issues the global philosophical community faces today? Where is the *phenomenological* contribution that lives up to the standards of conceptual precision of today’s best current philosophy of mind? I wholeheartedly agree with Zahavi on the dangers of phenomenological reification, the standard phenomenological fallacy. If we want to decide what *exists*, I think a good strategy is to investigate the coherence, the predictive and explanatory power, and the heuristic fertility in generating new hypotheses of competing theories that *make* ontological claims. It is true that there are certain complex events like operas, marriage ceremonies, and civil wars (p. 11) which cannot be predicted by the natural sciences. *No one* predicted the German wall coming down. This was a surprise for everyone. But where is the phenomenological theory about operas, marriage ceremonies, and civil wars that exhibits a higher degree of predictive power? I also concede that a major shortcoming in BNO is my frequent use of the term “phenomenology” in the absence of an extended discussion of its meaning. I also, of course, agree with Zahavi’s interpretation of Husserl being a transcendental philosopher and not an introspectionist, and with his criticism of naïve introspectionism. It is also true that the book could have been philosophically more interesting if I had included arguments that are more explicit for some of the background assumptions.

From a phenomenological perspective, I of course agree with many of the observations made by Dan Zahavi makes in his recent monograph, where he carefully reviews research fields like theory of mind, autism, or embodiment from a phenomenological perspective. I may disagree, however, that it is legitimate to speak of a non-conceptual sense of ownership strictly *whenever* we are phenomenally conscious (2005: 197), because I want to take the phenomenology of psychiatric syndromes like full depersonalization or of certain spiritual experiences more seriously as well. Nevertheless, I agree with Shoemaker (1984: 105; Zahavi: 203f) that it makes little sense to conceptually assimilate pre-reflective self-awareness to object perception—causal proximity, the non-existence of a distinct sensory *modality*, plus the emotionally represented properties of self-sustainment and homeostasis present important examples for arguments against the thesis that primitive self-knowledge is a form of object-representation. And just like Zahavi (2005: 204), I have pointed out how the subsymbolic

self-model is not only a specific type of experiential content, but a *mode of presentation*: self-consciousness is an epistemic *format* under which facts can be represented. What I had hoped for were new and original arguments to support our common case. But Zahavi frequently just states how phenomenology's contribution consists in "insisting" that a pre-reflective form of self-awareness exists. Yes, it is true that all such claims, particularly in combination with their implications for a theory of pre-conceptual *intersubjectivity*, possess an "obvious relevance not only for related discussions in analytical philosophy of mind, but also for empirical disciplines, such as developmental psychology and psychiatry" (2005: 177). But in order to build a bridge to the research frontier in analytical philosophy of mind, arguments or conceptual analyses would be needed, and in the end, any constructive contribution to the empirical disciplines investigating human self-consciousness would probably have to come up with some kind of testable prediction. I am sure that the future work of Dan Zahavi will provide us with both of these missing links.

Let me close by thanking not only him, but once again all the authors of the preceding commentaries for the great care and work they put into their thoughtful criticism of the self-model theory. I have learned a lot and gained a whole range of positive impulses. This is also true of a number of very interesting critical commentaries which could not be included in this special issue of PSYCHE. If I may add a personal interim conclusion from the current debate: It may be more fruitful to investigate the representational and functional deep structure of phenomenal self-consciousness from a truly interdisciplinary perspective, to focus on systematic detail questions and fine-grained, empirical bottom-up constraints, than to get lost in a competition of theories about what the appropriate weak notion of "self" is. Given the current stage of research, it may be better to turn to detail questions and discuss them in a sustainable manner. Ontology and the big picture will eventually fall into place all by themselves.

References

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