Introduction

What is a self? Does it exist in reality or is it a mere social construct—or perhaps a neurologically induced illusion? If something like a self exists, what role does it play in our conscious life, and how and when does it emerge in the development of the infant? What might such psychopathological and neuropsychiatric disorders as schizophrenia or autism reveal about the fragility of self-identity and self-coherence? As this brief list of questions indicates, the contemporary discussion of the self is highly interdisciplinary in nature (see, e.g., Gallagher and Shear 1999; Zahavi 2000; Kircher and David 2003).

The legitimacy of the concept of self has recently been questioned by both neuroscientists and philosophers. Some have argued that the self is nothing but an illusion created by an interplay of various subsystems and modules in the brain (Dennett 1991; Wegner 2002; Metzinger 2003a). Others have claimed that the concept of self is a Eurocentric invention with limited historical relevance (Berrios and Marková 2003). In contrast, the hypothesis to be defended in the following chapters is that the notion of self is crucial for a proper understanding of consciousness, and consequently it is indispensable to a variety of disciplines such as philosophy of mind, social philosophy, psychiatry, developmental psychology, and cognitive neuroscience.

It would, of course, be something of an exaggeration to claim that the concept of self is unequivocal and that there is widespread consensus about what, exactly, it means to be a self. Quite to the contrary, the concept is currently used in a manifold of rival senses and it is a simple fact that the concept connotes different things in different disciplines—sometimes radically different things. What is urgently needed is a clarification of the relationship between these sometimes conflicting, sometimes complementary notions and aspects of selfhood. Moreover, such a taxonomic clarification is essential in

order to evaluate the merits of the "no-self" doctrine, that is, the claim that the self is nothing but a fiction.

Such an investigation may also help clarify the perennial question concerning the relation between self and other. To what extent does selfhood involve interpersonal relations? Is the self necessarily embodied and embedded in a physical, social, and historical environment? Some have argued that the constitution of the self is a social process, that we are selves not by individual right, but in virtue of our relation to others and that we achieve self-awareness by adopting the perspective of the other toward ourselves. Who one is depends on the values, ideals, and goals one has: it is a question of what has significance and meaning, and this, of course, is conditioned by the linguistic community to which one belongs. Thus, it has been said that one cannot be a self on one's own, but only together with others. Others have denied that selfhood and self-experience emerge in the course of a (long) developmental process. While recognizing that the maturation of the self is a complex social process, they have also insisted that the sense of self is an integral and fundamental part of conscious life, which the infant is already in possession of from birth onward.

In order to shed light on these issues, I intend to investigate the relation between experience, self-awareness, and selfhood. What is the relation between (phenomenal) consciousness and the self? Are experiences always experiences for someone? Is it a conceptual and experiential truth that any episode of experiencing necessarily involves a *subject of experience*? Must we evoke a subject of experience in order to account for the unity and continuity of experience, or are experiences rather anonymous mental events that simply occur without being states or properties of anybody? What is the relation between self-awareness and the self? When we speak of self-awareness, do we then necessarily also speak of a self? Is there always a self involved in self-awareness, or is it possible to speak of self-awareness without assuming the existence of anybody being self-aware? Is *self*-awareness always to be understood as awareness of *a self*, or can it rather be understood simply as the awareness that a specific experience has of *itself*? Finally, what is the relation between consciousness and self-awareness? Is self-awareness the exception rather than the rule, insofar as consciousness is concerned? Is it something that occurs only occasionally in the life of the mind, or is it rather the case that conscious mental states differ from nonconscious mental states precisely by involving self-awareness, that is, is self-awareness a defining feature of all conscious states?

My claim is that none of the three notions can be properly understood in isolation. If we wish to understand what it means to be a *self*, we will have to examine the structure of *experience* and *self-awareness*, and vice versa. To put it differently, the claim I wish to make is that the investigations of self, self-awareness, and experience must be integrated if they are to be successful.

This approach is not without precedent. Many phenomenologists have engaged the question of self by focusing on its experiential givenness and by taking the first-person perspective seriously. They have typically taken an investigation of self-awareness to be crucial for an understanding of what it means to be a self; that is, they have typically argued that no account of self that failed to explain the experiential accessibility of the self to itself could be successful.

But why should one take the first-person perspective seriously, and why should one pay any attention to what phenomenology might have to say on the issue of selfhood and subjectivity? Is it not—as has recently been claimed—a discredited research program that has been intellectually bankrupt for at least fifty years?[1] Although this might have been a prevalent view in mainstream cognitive science and analytical philosophy of mind, the current situation is slightly more blurred. It is true that many scientists have, until recently, considered the study of phenomenal consciousness to be inherently unreliable owing to its subjective nature and thus unsuitable for scientific research. As Damasio writes, "studying consciousness was simply not the thing to do before you made tenure, and even after you did it was looked upon with suspicion" (Damasio 1999, 7). Some even went so far as to deny the existence of phenomenal consciousness (e.g. Rey 1991, 692). Within the last decade or so, however, a profound change has taken place, one occasionally described in terms of an ongoing "consciousness boom." Many new journals devoted to the study of consciousness have been established, and currently many scientists regard questions pertaining to the nature of phenomenal consciousness, the structure of the first-person perspective, and the status of the self to be among the few remaining major unsolved problems of modern science.

After a (too) long period of behaviorism and functionalism, it has consequently become rather obvious that the problem of subjectivity will not simply go away. A satisfying account of consciousness cannot make do with a mere functional analysis of intentional behavior, but must necessarily take

the first-personal or subjective dimension of consciousness seriously. Much consciousness research is still aimed at locating and identifying particular neural correlates of consciousness. Yet there is also a growing realization that we will not get very far in giving an account of the relationship between consciousness and the brain unless we have a clear conception of what it is that we are trying to relate. To put it another way, any assessment of the possibility of reducing consciousness to neuronal structures and any appraisal of whether a *naturalization* of consciousness is possible will require a detailed analysis and description of the experiential aspects of consciousness. As Nagel once pointed out, a necessary requirement for any coherent reductionism is that the entity to be reduced is properly understood (Nagel 1974, 437).

Given the recent interest in the subjective or phenomenal dimension of consciousness, it is no wonder that many analytical philosophers have started to emphasize the importance of *phenomenology*. An example is Owen Flanagan, who in his 1992 book *Consciousness Reconsidered* argues for what he calls the *natural method*. If we wish to undertake a serious investigation of consciousness we cannot make do with neuroscientific or psychological (i.e., functional) analyses alone; we also need to give phenomenology its due (Flanagan 1992, 11). Thus, when studying consciousness rather than, say, deep-sea ecology, we must take phenomenological considerations into account since an important and nonnegligible feature of consciousness is the way in which it is experienced by the subject. Similar claims can be found in the recent work of Searle, Block, McGinn, Chalmers, Strawson, and Baars, among many others.

At first glance, this might indeed seem to indicate that there has been a change of attitude, that the customary hostility is a thing of the past, and that analytical philosophers and cognitive scientists are currently appreciative of the philosophical resources found in phenomenology. Things are not that simple, however. Although a small number of prominent figures in consciousness research have recently started to take philosophical phenomenology seriously, the vast majority of (Anglophone) philosophers and cognitive scientists are not using the term in its technical sense when they talk of phenomenology, but are still simply referring to a first-person description of what the "what it is like" of experience is really like. In fact, there has been a widespread tendency to identify phenomenology with some kind of introspectionism. Phenomenology is not, however, just another name for a kind

of psychological self-observation; rather it is the name of a philosophical approach specifically interested in consciousness and experience inaugurated by Husserl and further developed and transformed by, among many others, Scheler, Heidegger, Gurwitsch, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Lévinas, Henry, and Ricoeur.

Philosophical phenomenology can offer much more to contemporary consciousness research than a simple compilation of introspective evidence.[2] Not only does it address issues and provide analyses that are crucial for an understanding of the true complexity of consciousness and which are nevertheless frequently absent from the current debate, but it can also offer a conceptual framework for understanding subjectivity that might be of considerably more value than some of the models currently in vogue in cognitive science. By ignoring the tradition and the resources therein, contemporary consciousness research risks missing out on important insights that, in the best of circumstances, will end up being rediscovered decades or centuries later (see, e.g., Zahavi 2002a, 2004a).

To put it bluntly, given some of the recent developments in cognitive science and analytical philosophy of mind along with the upsurge of theoretical and empirical interest in the subjective or phenomenal dimension of consciousness, it is simply counterproductive to continue to ignore the analyses of consciousness that phenomenology can provide. The fact that subjectivity has always been of central concern for phenomenologists, and that they have devoted so much time to a scrutiny of the first-person perspective, the structures of experience, time-consciousness, body-awareness, self-awareness, intentionality, and so forth, makes them obvious interlocutors.

The present book is an attempt to redeem some of these promissory notes. It will explore and present a number of phenomenological analyses pertaining to the nature of consciousness, self, and self-experience, but with an eye to contemporary discussions in consciousness research. This approach is motivated not only by the belief that consciousness research can profit from insights to be found in phenomenology; but also by the firm conviction that phenomenology needs to engage in a more critical dialogue with other philosophical and empirical positions than is currently the case. It is precisely by confronting, discussing, and criticizing alternative approaches that phenomenology can demonstrate its vitality and contemporary relevance. Of course this is not to deny that phenomenology has its own quite legitimate agenda; but the very attempt to engage in such a dialogue with analytical

philosophy of mind, developmental psychology, or psychopathology might force phenomenology to become more problem oriented and thereby counteract what is currently one of its greatest weaknesses: its preoccupation with exegesis.[3]

Chapter 1

The first chapter will provide a preliminary outline of a phenomenological account of the relation between consciousness and self-awareness. The main focus will be on Sartre's concept of pre-reflective self-awareness and on his claim that the experiential dimension is as such characterized by a primitive or minimal type of self-awareness. Sartre's view will first be contrasted with a number of competing definitions of self-awareness found in developmental psychology, social philosophy, and philosophy of language. It will then be compared in detail to a prevalent version of the higher-order theory of consciousness, according to which the difference between a conscious and a nonconscious mental state rests on the presence or absence of a relevant meta-mental state. Despite a superficial similarity, it will be shown that Sartre's theory differs from the higher-order theory by its firm commitment to a one-level account of consciousness. The chapter will conclude by discussing whether higher-order theories can adequately account for the first-person perspective, or whether their attempt to do so gives rise to an infinite regress.

After setting the scene in the introductory chapter, the phenomenological analyses of the relation between self, consciousness, and self-consciousness will be discussed in more detail in the next three chapters. The focus, in particular, will be on Husserl's initial analysis of consciousness in *Logische Untersuchungen* (chapter 2), on his later analysis of time-consciousness (chapter 3), and on Heidegger's discussion of whether reflection can provide us with reliable access to the experiential dimension (chapter 4).

Chapter 2

The second chapter will take up two issues that are discussed in the beginning of Husserl's Fifth Logical Investigation (1901), and which will be crucial to the argument in the chapters to follow. The first issue concerns whether consciousness contains an ego, or in other words, whether every episode of

experiencing necessarily involves a *subject of experience*. The second asks how we aware of our own occurrent experiences; how are they given to us? Husserl's answer to the first question constitutes a defense of a non-egological theory of consciousness that in many ways anticipates Sartre's arguments in *La transcendance de l'ego*. His reply to the second question takes the form of a critical response to Brentano's position in *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*. I will analyze Sartre's and Brentano's positions and show that Husserl, contrary to what has been the prevalent interpretation, advocated a concept of pre-reflective self-awareness already in *Logische Untersuchungen*.

Chapter 3

Husserl's discussion of self, consciousness, and self-awareness in *Logische Untersuchungen* was not the culmination, however, but only the beginning of his lifelong struggle with these issues. The third chapter will investigate the considerably more complex and sophisticated account that can be found in Husserl's later writings on inner time-consciousness (1905–1910, 1917–1918). It is in these lectures and research manuscripts that Husserl attempted to analyze the inner structure of pre-reflective self-awareness in terms of the temporal schema *protention–primal presentation–retention*. One of the questions to be discussed is whether our experiences are given as objects in inner time-consciousness prior to reflection, or whether pre-reflective self-awareness is by nature nonobjectifying.

Chapter 4

Phenomenology is generally assumed to employ a reflective methodology. But does reflection provide us with a reliable and trustworthy access to subjectivity, or does it rather objectify and distort that which it makes appear? Natorp discussed this question in his *Allgemeine Psychologie* (1912), and the conclusion he reached was highly anti-phenomenological. In the fourth chapter, I give a presentation of Natorp's neo-Kantian criticism followed by a discussion of Heidegger's subsequent response to it. This response can be found in Heidegger's early Freiburg lectures (1919–1922), and apart from addressing the concerns of Natorp, it provides a clear exposé of Heidegger's early views on self and experience. One of the implications of the analysis

is that “reflection” is a polysemical term and that it is necessary to distinguish between different types of reflection. This is a view shared by Sartre, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty. Although all of the latter rejected the view that reflection necessarily distorts lived experience (they occasionally compare reflection to attention), they nevertheless insisted that reflection does occasion a kind of self-alteration. Indeed, some forms of reflection might even be characterized as a kind of self-alienation. They involve the adoption of the perspective of the other on oneself. The chapter concludes by discussing the tenability of the customary distinction between two types of phenomenology, a reflective and a hermeneutical.

Chapter 5

After the detailed analyses in chapters 2–4, the central fifth chapter of the book will contain an extensive discussion of subjectivity and selfhood. The chapter will begin by discussing some classical and contemporary arguments in favor of a non-egological theory of consciousness and will then turn to a detailed analysis of two different notions of self: (1) the self as a narrative construction and (2) the self as an experiential dimension. The narrative approach, advocated by Ricoeur, MacIntyre, and Dennett, among others, conceives of the self as the product of a narratively structured life, thereby stressing the socially and linguistically constructed character of the self; the experiential approach, primarily defended by Husserl and Henry, insists that an investigation of the self must necessarily involve the first-person perspective and ultimately conceives of the self as the *invariant* dimension of first-personal givenness within the multitude of changing experiences. After considering some of the limitations of the narrative approach, in particular the concern that by declaring the self a construction, it might be committed to a version of the no-self doctrine and, after analyzing the structure of first-personal givenness and phenomenal consciousness in detail, thereby adding new facets to the previous discussion in chapter 1, I will argue that the two notions of self are complementary. At the same time, I argue that the experiential notion of a core or minimal self is both more fundamental than and a presupposition of the narrative self. The chapter concludes by discussing some of the empirical implications of this conclusion, in particular its relevance for our understanding of the disorders of self encountered in neurological and psychiatric afflictions.

The references in chapter 4 and 5 to intersubjectively mediated forms of self-awareness and self-understanding lead to a focused discussion of the relation between the experience of self and the experience of others in the final two chapters of the book.

Chapter 6

The sixth chapter will provide a systematic outline of the different phenomenological approaches to intersubjectivity (Scheler, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, and Sartre), thereby allowing for a more nuanced perspective on the link between selfhood and otherness. The point of departure will be Scheler's criticism of the argument from analogy. It will quickly become clear that a proper understanding of our experience of others must entail a proper understanding of the relation between experience and expressive behavior. Our understanding of how we come to experience others as minded bodies must include a correct appreciation of how we come to experience ourselves as embodied minds. This observation, however, which will be crucial to the discussion of the theory of mind in chapter 7, is, only the beginning. Much more is at stake in the phenomenological analyses than simply a "solution" to the "traditional" problem of other minds. Intersubjectivity does not merely concern concrete face-to-face encounters between individuals. It is also something that is at play in perception, in the use of tools, in the expression of various emotions, and in different types of self-experience and self-apprehension. Ultimately, the phenomenologists will argue that a treatment of intersubjectivity requires a simultaneous analysis of the relationship between subjectivity and world. It is not satisfactory to simply insert intersubjectivity somewhere within an already established metaphysical framework; rather, the three dimensions "self," "others," and "world" reciprocally illuminate one another and can be fully understood only in their interconnection.

Chapter 7

The concluding seventh chapter will address the problem of selfhood and self-awareness by discussing the validity of the theory-theory of mind, that is, the validity of the claim that the experience of minded beings (be it oneself or others) requires a theory of mind. This claim has found wide resonance

in a number of empirical disciplines, not the least in the study of autism. Is it true, however, that self-awareness and intersubjectivity—the experience of self and of others—are theoretical, inferential, and quasi-scientific in nature? Is it true that mental states are unobservable and are theoretically postulated explanatory devices introduced in order to help us predict and explain behavioral data? Drawing on insights and results obtained in the previous chapters (in particular the discussions of higher-order theories, of pre-reflective self-awareness, of self-disorders in schizophrenia, and of embodied intersubjectivity) and supplementing these with empirical findings from contemporary developmental psychology concerning infantile experience of self and other, I will argue here that the theory-theory of mind is mistaken when it claims that theoretical knowledge constitutes the core of what we call upon when we understand ourselves and others.