Wherever You Go, There You Are: On Individuative Subjective Phenomenology

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Abstract

That experience requires a subject is all but uncontroversial. It is surprising, then, that contemporary philosophers of mind generally focus on experiences at the expense of subjects. Herein, I argue that beyond the qualitative character (or “what-it’s-like-ness”) of phenomenology, there is a discrete further fact—the subjective character (or “for-me-ness”) of phenomenology—that calls out for explanation. Similar views have recently been endorsed by both Zahavi and Kriegel, but a comparison of the ways they have framed the issue suggests there are two discrete questions afoot: (1) in virtue of what does subjective phenomenology exist whatsoever, and (2) in virtue of what might one’s subjective phenomenology differ from that of one’s perfect duplicate? The second question—that of individuative subjective phenomenology—is my primary concern, and its answer seems to me to require the invocation of haecceities: non-qualitative, non-duplicable properties that uniquely individuate objects (and, in this case, subjects). In other words, I suggest that the property of being the very subject that one is enters essentially into the phenomenological character of all one’s experiences.

1. Experiences and Subjects

Instances of genuine consensus may be frustratingly rare among philosophers of mind, but nearly everyone agrees on this much: experience requires a subject. The extent of this consensus is reflected in the fact that “subjectivity” is, at least in the contemporary debate, typically treated as synonymous with “experientiality” (or “consciousness,” “phenomenality,” “qualitative feel,” etc.). And I take it the claim is uncontroversial largely because it is obviously, manifestly true: necessarily—nomically, metaphysically, and perhaps even logically—any experience of something is an experience for someone.
Of course, obvious and manifest truths are not necessarily uninteresting or trivial ones: sometimes they are the hardest to explain. After all, it is equally uncontroversial that all experience is experience of something (or at least as of something), yet countless words have been written on the nature of this obvious, manifest fact in the past two decades alone! Rarer by far, though, have been explorations of the former fact, and I am not sure why this is. Prima facie, the existence and nature of conscious subjects is no less mysterious than the existence and nature of conscious experiences\(^2\)—and we all tend to agree that you can’t have one without the other. Perhaps, among philosophers of mind at least, there exists a (more or less unstated) background assumption that any explanation of subjects must be predicated on an explanation of experiences. In other words, perhaps the hope is that subjects will prove reducible to experiences, fully explicable in terms of experiences: perhaps, once one has a full explanation of how experiences come to be, the explanation of how subjects come to be will just fall out naturally.\(^3\) The alternative to such a reduction, one might fear, would be that bête noire of contemporary philosophy of mind, the Cartesian homunculus.

This concern alone might well explain the dialectical turn toward experiences at the expense of subjects. But it is hardly clear that taking subjects seriously must automatically put one on a slippery slope to the dread Cartesian theatre. After all, contemporary epistemologists are generally happy to admit the existence of so-called de se attitudes—non-duplicable, irreducibly subject-specific states of belief, desire, fear, etc.—without any concern for, shall we say, homuncular implications. Why, then, should philosophers of mind tend to avoid consideration of non-duplicable, irreducibly subject-specific phenomenal states? Why, if we are comfortable discussing de se attitudes, should we not consider the possibility of de se phenomenology?

This is not to say the subject has never come up. After his brief taxonomy of typical phenomenal states in *The Conscious Mind*, David Chalmers includes this section on “the sense of self”:

One sometimes feels that there is something to conscious experience that transcends all these [above-listed] specific elements: a kind of background hum, for instance, that is somehow fundamental to consciousness and that is there even when the other components are not. This phenomenology of self is so deep and intangible that it sometimes seems illusory, consisting in nothing over and above specific elements such as those listed above. Still, there seems to be something to the phenomenology of self, even if it is very hard to pin down.\(^4\)
The very title of Thomas Nagel’s *The View from Nowhere*, meanwhile, suggests a sort of reductio of any analysis of mind that leaves out the essential point-of-viewedness/de se nature/subjectivity-qua-subjecthood of conscious experience. Paraphrasing Geoffrey Madell, Nagel writes that “what unites all my experiences . . . is simply that they all have the irreducible and unanalyzable property of ‘mineness.’” To offer an account of the world that ignores this crucial property is to take up a “view from nowhere” that leaves no room for the reality that *all experience is perspectival*. Recently, Dan Zahavi has taken up a similar point, sketching out a thought experiment to which we shall return frequently in what follows (Zahavi’s “first-person givenness” may, I think, fairly be read as “subjectivity”):

Consider two clones that are qualitatively identical when it comes to physical and mental characteristics. From a third-person perspective, it would indeed be hard to distinguish the two (except in terms of spatial location), and the presence of first-personal givenness would be useless as a criterion of individuation, since both of their experiential streams would possess it . . . . But compare, then, what happens when we instead adopt the first-person perspective. Let us assume that I am one of the clones. Although my mental and physical characteristics are qualitatively identical to those of my ‘twin’, there will still remain a crucial and all-decisive difference between me and him, a difference that would prevent any confusion between the two of us. What might that difference consist in? It obviously has to do with the fact that only my experiences are given in a first-personal mode of presentation to me, whereas the qualitatively identical experiences of my clone are not given first-personally to me at all, and are therefore not part of my experiential life.

Considering a similar case of qualitatively identical clones (henceforth, Perfect Twins), Katalin Farkas writes. “Given the difference between our mental lives, perhaps it would be better to say that the phenomenology of my conscious thoughts is different from hers, simply because they involve a different subject—that there is a primitive phenomenological difference between what it is like to be me and what it is like to be my Twin.” Along similar lines, Uriah Kriegel has drawn a distinction between an experience’s “qualitative character” (its “what-it’s-like-ness”) and its “subjective character” (its “for-me-ness”), noting too that “the philosophical literature on consciousness focuses mainly on experience’s qualitative character” at the expense of its subjective character. Galen Strawson, meanwhile, has argued against the reduction of subjects to their experiences, claiming that “even when one restricts oneself to the purely experiential level of description, one is obliged to distinguish the experiencer or subject of experience from the experiential content of the experience in giving
a full account of what there is... The ineliminability of the subject of experience... is just a simple consequence of the essential ‘for-someone-ness’ of experience.” \(^{10}\) And Sydney Shoemaker comes close, I think, to suggesting (or at least motivating) a proprietary subjective phenomenology in his *The First Person and Other Essays*, writing that “obviously... the introspective observation of a self being angry is not going to yield the knowledge that I am angry unless I know that that self is myself. How am I supposed to know this?... On pain of infinite regress, it must be allowed that somewhere along the line I have some self-knowledge that is not gotten by observing something to be true about myself.” \(^{11}\) Plausibly, the self-knowledge Shoemaker has in mind comes to us directly from what Kriegel calls the “subjective character” of our experience: my knowledge that *this* self is *myself* is not derived or inferred from other knowledge, nor is it any product of a priori reasoning; rather, it arises immediately from my subjective or *de se* phenomenology.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to derive a clear idea of the desideratum from the few aforementioned discussions. What, exactly, is the nature of subjective or *de se* phenomenology, if such there be? Consider that Shoemaker makes his point in the service of denying that the ultimate source of our introspective self-knowledge is sensory or quasi-sensory. If Shoemaker is on target with this, and I think he is, then any *de se* phenomenology would have to be non-sensory phenomenology, the existence of which is controversial (see the ongoing debate over the existence of cognitive phenomenology). I myself consider this a bullet worth biting, but others will surely disagree. In any case, I wish to bracket this issue for now, for far more vexing is the implication in the above passages that subjective or *de se* phenomenology should properly be described as non-qualitative. To help draw out this point, the next section will show how Zahavi and Kriegel—the two philosophers perhaps most concerned with subjective phenomenology today—are, despite appearances, actually addressing two distinct (if related) phenomena in their respective discussions of “for-me-ness.”

2. Two Approaches to Subjective Phenomenology

2.1. Zahavi’s Approach

Recall Zahavi’s case of the Perfect Twins: two individuals who are “qualitatively identical when it comes to physical and mental characteristics.” From the third-person perspective—that is, from Nagel’s “view from nowhere”—Twin A and Twin B should appear phenomenologically indistinguishable. If, *per impossibile*, one could “replace” Twin A’s phenomenology with Twin B’s (so that Twin A and Twin B would both have Twin B’s phenomenology), nothing about the world would seem to have changed; likewise if one
were to “switch” the Twins’ respective phenomenologies. Yet now, again, imagine that you happen to be Twin A: despite your third-personal phenomenal indistinguishability from Twin B, there will still remain, as Zahavi says, “a crucial and all-decisive difference” between you and your Perfect Twin, “a difference that would prevent any confusion” between you. Specifically, only your experiences “are given in a first-personal mode of presentation” to you, while Twin B’s experiences are “not given first-personally to [you] at all,” and so do not enter into your phenomenology whatsoever. The differentiating factor—what Zahavi likes to call “first-personal (self-)givenness”—would appear to be some sort of intrinsic, non-qualitative, non-duplicable property that enters directly into all and only your experiences. Of course, your Perfect Twin has a property of this kind too, but it is a different property than the one you have. If this is initially hard to swallow, recall an analogous situation familiar from epistemology: although, in a broad sense, you and Twin B will have the same de se attitudes (you both, for example, might think “I am the one currently reading this paper”), strictly speaking, your de se attitudes are yours and yours alone; your Perfect Twin cannot actually share those. Zahavi’s contention is that your first-personal (self-)givenness—the “for-me-ness” of your experience, your subjective phenomenology—is likewise yours and yours alone, however similar (i.e., third-personally indistinguishable) Twin B’s respective first-personal givenness.

We must distinguish, then, between subjective phenomenology simpliciter (that which you and your Perfect Twin do share) and individuative subjective phenomenology (that which is unique to each of you, hereafter ISP). It is clearly the latter Zahavi has in mind when he claims that:

[C]onscious mental states are given in a distinct manner, with a distinct subjective presence, to the subject whose mental states they are, in a way that in principle is unavailable to others. When saying ‘distinct’, the claim is not that the subject of the experience is explicitly aware of their distinct character: the point is not that the subject is necessarily attending to the distinctness in any way. But the first-personal self-givenness is distinctive even before, say, a child becomes explicitly aware of it, just as it is unavailable to others even prior to a child recognizing this.12

And since, again, you and your Perfect Twin are, by hypothesis, “qualitatively identical when it comes to . . . mental characteristics,” the phenomenological difference between you had better not turn out to be (or hang on) anything qualitative. Accordingly, Zahavi says:

The for-me-ness or mineness in question is not a quality like scarlet, sour, or soft. It doesn’t refer to a specific experiential content, to a specific what, nor does it refer to
the diachronic or synchronic sum of such content, or to some other relation that might obtain between the contents in question. Rather, it refers to the distinct givenness or how of experience. It refers to the first-personal presence of experience. It refers to the fact that the experiences I am living through are given differently . . . to me than to anybody else.\textsuperscript{13}

With this said, an obvious objection now waits in the wings, which will be worth addressing before we continue on to Kriegel’s treatment of subjective phenomenology.

2.2. Non-Qualitative Phenomenology?

It may be objected that the Perfect Twins case, as described, provides an easy reductio of the very point it is supposed to illustrate. One version of the objection might go as follows:

(1) The Perfect Twins are, by hypothesis, qualitatively indiscernible.
(2) Phenomenology consists only of qualitative properties.
(3) Phenomenal difference is, necessarily, qualitative difference.
(4) By hypothesis, then, the Perfect Twins are phenomenologically indiscernible.
(5) There can be no individuating subjective phenomenology distinctive to each Perfect Twin.

Alternatively, one could replace (3) and (4) with the following, and reach the same conclusion:

(6) All qualitative properties are duplicable, at least in principle.
(7) All phenomenology is duplicable, at least in principle.

These certainly seem like valid objections. Arguably, of course, they beg the question against non-qualitative phenomenology—and as we have seen, if Zahavi-style ISP exists, it has got to be non-qualitative, on pain of not being individuative between qualitatively identical Perfect Twins. Simply proclaiming ISP a \textit{contradictio in adjecto} does nothing to diminish the evident (indeed, intuitive) possibility that Perfect Twins are distinguishable from the first-person perspective. Given the stipulated facts, this distinguishability is plausibly best explained by the existence of ISP, and this in turn gives us reason to question (2)–(5). Specifically, it may simply be wrong to assume that all phenomenology is qualitative: perhaps, instead, (2) should be reworded as “phenomenology consists only of properties.” Likewise, to dismiss the possibility of ISP on the purely theoretical assumption that phenomenology consists only of \textit{duplicable} properties—per (6) and (7)—seems over-
hasty. Presumably it will not be denied that non-duplicable properties are possible (take, for example, the property of being you); why should it be assumed they could never enter into phenomenology? So if we amend (2) as suggested, we may allow (6) while denying (7) and the conclusion it entails.

Nevertheless, the objector might turn the tables and claim that, in amending (2), it is we who are begging the question. After all, the existence of ISP has hardly been conclusively demonstrated; perhaps it simply doesn’t exist, and (2) is the reason why. But consider what a denial of ISP would entail: that what it’s like to be you is no different whatsoever from what it’s like to be your Perfect Twin. Recall that ISP is alleged, on Zahavi’s view, to “prevent any confusion” between you and your Perfect Twin: it is ISP that allows you, from the first-personal perspective, to know that you are the discrete subject you are. Without it, you will be indistinguishable from your Perfect Twin not only at the third-personal level of description, but also at the first-personal level. You will have literally no way of knowing whether you are the subject you are or a distinct but qualitatively identical subject. In fact, as will presently be shown, it’s difficult to see how, on a wholly qualitative (and, a fortiori, ISP-denying) view of phenomenology, you could even be said to have a phenomenology distinct from your Perfect Twin’s. Consider first this passage from Zahavi:

[On an ISP-denying view,] even if one had to concede that two persons, who had two simultaneous and qualitatively identical experiences, would still have two numerical [sic] distinct experiences, this would merely be because, to quote Parfit, “one of these experiences is this experience, occurring in this particular mental life, and the other is that experience, occurring in that other particular mental life” (Parfit 1987: 517. Cf. 1987: 252).  

Presumably, the thought behind the Parfitian move is to make it somehow a priori that, in being this one rather than that one, one can distinguish oneself from other qualitatively identical subjects—in which case ISP (or really, even subjective phenomenology simpliciter) is unnecessary. The twins are simply two tokens of the same type; problem solved. One possible (if cheap) response to this would be simply to claim that, if “a priori” is taken, per usual, to mean “prior to experience,” then it is simply impossible that I should come to know I am the subject of this experience rather than that one prior to my own experience. Zahavi’s own response is essentially an appeal to the intuition that since your phenomenology is given to you but not to Twin B, there just must be some phenomenal difference between you and Twin B (namely, the difference between your phenomenology being yours and Twin B’s being Twin B’s):
It could consequently be claimed that anybody who denies the [individuating] for-me-ness or mineness of experience simply fails to recognize an essential constitutive aspect of experience. Such a denial would be tantamount to a denial of the first-person perspective. It would entail the view that my own mind is either not given to me at all—I would be mind-blind or self-blind—or present to me in exactly the same way as the minds of others.\textsuperscript{16}

But I think an even stronger case can be made for rejecting the Parfitian “different token” account of phenomenological differentiation. Consider two qualitatively identical paint chips X and Y, each colored Red\textsubscript{15}. Now consider the counterfactual question: “What would be different about the world if X had the Red\textsubscript{15} that Y currently has, and vice versa?” On a standard account of (qualitative) properties as universals, this question would amount to a sort of category mistake: the Red\textsubscript{15} currently possessed by X would be, by hypothesis, \textit{one and the same Red}\textsubscript{15} as that currently possessed by Y, so any counterfactual “switching” of X’s Red\textsubscript{15} for Y’s Red\textsubscript{15} is either impossible (because there are not, in fact, two properties to “switch”) or irrelevant (because X already has the Red\textsubscript{15} possessed by Y, and vice versa). Rather, X and Y possess \textit{exactly the same Red}\textsubscript{15}, for there is only one Red\textsubscript{15} to possess. And the same goes for X and Y’s other (qualitative) properties, of course\textsuperscript{17}, rendering equally misguided the question “What would be different about the world if X had the properties that Y currently has, and vice versa?” Whether considered individually or as a massive conjunction, all the properties possessed by X and Y are one and the same, so this world already is a world in which X has the properties that Y currently has, and vice versa. So the fact that X and Y are describable as two discrete tokens of the same type is irrelevant to the question of whether they possess the very same (qualitative) properties. They do, by hypothesis.

Suppose, then, that phenomenal character is exhaustively qualitative—exhaustively determined by and describable in terms of qualitative properties, taken here as universals. Then, by parity of reasoning, our Perfect Twins should possess \textit{exactly the same} phenomenal character: the phenomenal character currently possessed by A would be, by hypothesis, \textit{one and the same} phenomenal character as that currently possessed by B. So any counterfactual “switching” of A’s phenomenal character for B’s phenomenal character is either impossible (because there are not, in fact, two phenomenal characters to “switch”) or irrelevant (because A already has the phenomenal character possessed by B, and vice versa). Whether considered individually or as a massive conjunction, all the phenomenal-character properties possessed by A and B are one and the same, so this world already is a world in which A has the properties that B currently has, and vice versa. So the fact that A and B are describable as two discrete tokens of the same type is irrelevant to the question of
whether they possess the very same phenomenal character. They do, by hypothesis. So if there is no ISP—if phenomenological character is exhaustively determined by duplicable qualitative properties—not only can you not know whether your phenomenology is your own or your Perfect Twin’s, but your phenomenology will just be your Perfect Twin’s, and vice versa!

I have found, at least in casual philosophical conversation, that this last point can be difficult to grasp, so let me be explicit: if the phenomenology of a conscious subject is exhaustively qualitative—if there is literally nothing to it but qualities-a.k.a.-universals—then, given a standard realist view about universals, Perfect Twins necessarily partake of one and the same phenomenology. They will literally and completely share every bit of their phenomenology, just as surely as the two paint chips share the same—the very same, the one and only—Red15. They of course may, from the third-personal point of view, be counted as two discrete subjects (objects, really): one here, one there. But remember, the question was whether you and your Perfect Twin are distinguishable from the first-personal point of view. Well, it seems uncontroversial to say that the first-personal point of view is the phenomenal point of view—but if to be phenomenal is to be qualitative, then the question becomes whether you and your perfect qualitative duplicate are distinguishable from the qualitative point of view. It seems clear the answer to this question must be no, by hypothesis. And that’s just the epistemic situation; ontologically, things are even worse. For whether we take the first- or third-person points of view, we are confronted by the fact that on the standard realist account of universals, genuine indiscernibility entails—and is arguably even constitutive of—numerical identity. So if phenomenology is to be exhaustively reducible to universals, the conclusion appears unavoidable: from whatever point of view you choose, the phenomenologies of you and your Perfect Twin will not only be qualitatively indiscernible, but will (by dint of that very indiscernibility) be numerically identical.18 There will be no way to tell you apart, phenomenologically, because there will be nothing to tell apart, phenomenologically. To my mind, at least, this seems like a bad result, and strongly motivates the case for accepting ISP and rejecting the received wisdom that phenomenology is exhausted by the qualitative.

2.3. Kriegel’s Approach

We are now well positioned to appreciate two crucial shortcomings of Kriegel’s approach to subjective phenomenology: (1) that it doesn’t draw a clear enough distinction between the qualitative and the subjective, and (2) that ultimately, it aims only to explain subjective phenomenology simpliciter, not the more important phenomenon of ISP.
The account starts out promising enough: the distinction Kriegel draws between qualitative and subjective phenomenological characters (between, again, “what-it’s-like-ness” and “for-me-ness”) is certainly one I wish to preserve. Unfortunately, he cashes out that distinction in terms of “a representation of some environmental feature and a representation of that representation.” That is, qualitative phenomenology is due to representations of environmental features (including, of course, certain features about oneself, e.g., proprioceptive features) while subjective phenomenology is due to representations of those representations. These aspects are then integrated in a process that in, e.g., the case of perceiving a red circle, “yields a unified representation of the red circle and the representation of the red circle. This new representation has precisely the sort of representational content we want a state with subjective character to have . . . the special translucence we seek.” It is not at all clear to me, at least how this gets us what we want, and I would argue that Kriegel ignores his own distinction here, effectively reducing subjective phenomenology to a mere iteration of qualitative phenomenology. After all, why should the representation of a representation (or, for that matter, the integration of those two representations into a single, unified representation) yield a new kind of phenomenology—i.e., subjective rather than qualitative—as opposed to just a new instance of qualitative phenomenology, a second-order qualitative phenomenology? Prima facie, there is nothing about representing a representation of something that should yield a representation for someone. Take one of Dretske’s speedometers and point a video camera at it: you have now created a representation of a representation of speed, but surely you have not created subjective phenomenology. Nor is there any reason to think integrating those two representations into a single, unified representation will suffice. Something important, it seems, is missing from Kriegel’s account.

But even if higher-order representations could yield subjective phenomenology, Kriegel’s model would explain only subjective phenomenology simpliciter; ISP would remain unaccounted for. That is, even if Kriegel can explain the general phenomenon of “for-me-ness,” his third-personal account doesn’t explain or even acknowledge the first-personally evident distinction between your “for-me-ness” and that of your Perfect Twin. As Zahavi puts it, “from a third-person perspective there would be no significant difference at all between the first-person givenness characterizing the experiential stream of clone A, and the first-person givenness characterizing the experiential stream of clone B.” To the extent, then, that you agree there is a significant difference between your phenomenology and your Perfect Twin’s, you should find Kriegel’s cross-order information integration model incomplete at best.
3. The Phenomenology of Haecceity (and its Implications)

If one feels the pull of the ISP intuition, then it seems the best option is not only to distinguish the qualitative character of phenomenology from its subjective character, but to further insist that this subjective character be associated with some essential, individuative, non-qualitative, non-duplicable property. Such a property would, it seems, meet all the criteria for being a *haecceity*. It follows that phenomenal awareness of one’s ISP involves some sort of direct acquaintance with one’s own haecceity. Whether this entails acquaintance with one’s own *physical* haecceity or merely acquaintance with one’s haecceity-qua-discrete-subject (if these should even turn out to be different things) remains unclear, but the current proposal is this:

Just as it is alleged that every *object* possesses a unique haecceity—an essential, individuative, non-qualitative, non-duplicable *physical* property shared by no other object in this or any possible world—every *subject* also possesses a unique haecceity: an essential, individuative, non-qualitative, non-duplicable *phenomenal* property shared by no other subject in this or any possible world.

Those who are generally sympathetic to haecceities should find this proposal unproblematic. It certainly seems in keeping with Gary Rosencrantz’s influential work on the subject, according to which acquaintance with oneself *qua* individual necessarily entails a grasp of one’s own haecceity; I would amend this only to say that acquaintance with oneself *qua* subject necessarily entails (preconceptual, non-explicit) awareness of one’s own haecceity.24

What would be the significance of this, if true? For one, it would seem to scuttle the externalist-representationalist-transparentist (ERT) account of phenomenological character advocated by, among others, Michael Tye.25 According to externalist representationalism, phenomenological character is exhaustively determined by those external properties currently being represented to a subject. According to transparency, all we are (and can ever be) consciously aware of are these external properties. Taking these two views together as ERT clearly leaves no room for subject-specific phenomenology. While every subject certainly has a point of view, on ERT, no subject can be phenomenally aware of that point of view—that is, a subject’s unique point of view does not and cannot enter at all into the character of that subject’s phenomenology. In fact, not only does ERT rule out the possibility of ISP, but it even rules out the possibility of subjective phenomenology *simpliciter*. After all, if subjective phenomenology of any sort exists, it will not plausibly be described as representing some property or properties *external* to the subject! Yet it seems
subjective phenomenology does exist—at the very least, subjective phenomenology *simpliciter* exists, and this is enough to spell trouble for ERT. Though Zahavi does not explicitly address ERT, his comments on ISP make clear the stakes:

Whatever their type, whatever their object, there is something that [my] different experiences have in common. . . . [They] are all characterized by the same fundamental first-personal character. They are all characterized by what might be called a dimension of *for-me-ness* or *mineness*. . . . If I compare two experiences, say the perception of a green apple and the recollection of a yellow lemon, I can focus on the difference between the two, namely the respective object and mode of presentation, but I can also attend to that which remains the same, namely the first-personal self-givenness of both experiences.²⁶

This state of affairs should be impossible on ERT (and, for that matter, on externalist representationalism of any sort). If Zahavi is right, then, ERT (and, for that matter, externalist representationalism of any sort) should be rejected. Now, a defender of ERT might object that the awareness Zahavi describes is “fact-awareness” or “awareness that” rather than “property-awareness” or “awareness of,” but “mineness” surely seems to be a property rather than a fact. If “mineness” enters into the character of my phenomenology, then, it is most plausibly something I am aware of. Of course, I may also be aware that my phenomenology has the property of “mineness” (just as I may be aware that my Perfect Twin’s phenomenology has, for him, the property of “mineness”) but this knowledge is, in the first instance, derivative on my direct awareness of the “mineness” of my phenomenology.

That said, the implications of ISP—of the phenomenology of haecceity—are not, I think, limited only to philosophy of mind. If, like me, you feel some discomfort at the thought of stepping into a Parfitian teletransporter—at the thought of being destroyed and replaced with a Perfect Twin—but nevertheless feel dissatisfied with standard physicalism about personal identity, ISP could explain why: we all, from the moment we begin experiencing anything, experience our own essential, individuative, non-qualitative, non-duplicable subjectivity. No Perfect Twin can share this proprietary property, much less experience it, and so it is only natural that we should find Parfitian replication a measure of absolute last resort, a gesture of vanity and little else. *Pace* Parfit, we might say it is not mere psychological continuity that matters to survival, but rather phenomenological continuity. And since the character of phenomenology is entirely and necessarily infused with ISP, there is no way my Perfect Twin could ever be phenomenologically continuous with me.
Similar views have, in fact, begun creeping into the personal-identity literature in recent years. Although motivated by rather different considerations than my own, an argument for the importance of phenomenological continuity can be found in Dainton and Bayne 2005. And in a brand-new book, Marya Schechtman observes almost in passing that although many psychological continuity theorists believe “there must . . . be a phenomenological difference between ordinary psychological continuity and one’s relation to a [Parfitian] replica,” they “do not tell us what that phenomenological difference amounts to, or provide any argument that it will necessarily be absent in replication.” Though the present essay was completed before I became aware of Schechtman’s complaints, I think it implies a rough-and-ready answer to them: the phenomenological difference amounts to the ever-present sensation of “for-me-ness,” and it is necessarily absent in replication because it is (or is engendered by) a haecceital property rather than a qualitative one.

As a final note, I also believe that accepting the existence of ISP could have fruitful implications for the epistemology of de se attitudes. Indeed, the phenomenal awareness we each have of our respective ISP could be held to be the epistemic foundation for all de se attitudes. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this possibility in any significant detail, but this passage from Zahavi is suggestive:

> [F]or a subject to own something in a perspectival sense is simply for the experience, thought, or action in question to present itself in a distinctive manner to the subject whose experience, thought or action it is. So the reason I can be said to perspectivally own my thoughts or perceptions . . . is because they appear to me in a manner that is different from how they can appear to anybody else.

4. Closing Thoughts

Despite his emphasis on the importance of the first-person perspective, Nagel explicitly states that “being mine is not a phenomenological quality of my experiences.” Read in a certain light, this is precisely the claim I wish to deny: that is, I deny that “being mine is not a phenomenological property of my experiences.” Every moment of my conscious life, I experience my phenomenology as mine, as I suspect all healthy conscious subjects must.

Now, in a certain sense, it might seem trivially true that my phenomenology has a proprietary subjective component: it is, after all, mine. Whatever one’s stance on qualia, it is generally taken as a datum that conscious experience is inherently private, first-personal, inaccessible to others, etc. But does that proprietary aspect of phenomenology actually show up in phenomenology? It is intuitive to me that it does—but this, I have come to learn, is a
much more controversial claim. Some, I suspect, have post-theoretic convictions that would make the acknowledgement of ISP tantamount to philosophical defeat, and there is little that I or anyone could say to disabuse them of their disbelief. For the rest, I can only hope the present effort has shone some light on an element of experience so taken for granted as to sometimes go unacknowledged.

References


Notes

1 Granted, some Eastern traditions (e.g., Theravda Buddhism) deny the reality of a metaphysically unchangeable and eternal self, but even these do not necessarily deny the reality of conscious experience for an ever-changing “empirical” self—one at least enduring enough to be capable of purification and evolution over a lifetime of devoted practice.

2 If anything, it seems more mysterious. Speaking only for myself, I could bracket the Hard Problem (how, why, and whether physical processes give rise to conscious experiences) and grant that conscious experiences somehow exist (or don’t), or that a solution to the Hard Problem will someday be found (or won’t), and yet remain utterly befuddled as to the seemingly distinct question of how I (of all people!) ended up the subject of just these conscious experiences.

3 Indeed, in his recent treatments of the so-called combination problem for panpsychism, Sam Coleman has explicitly endorsed a view on which phenomenal qualities are primitive but subjectivity is derived. See
Coleman 2012 and 2013.

4 Chalmers 1996, 10.

5 Nagel 1986, 34.

6 Zahavi 2011, 68.

7 Farkas 2008, 276.

8 Kriegel 2005, 1–3.

9 Notably, Strawson also argues for the identity of experiences, subjects, and contents, but this is a non-reductive, non-eliminative identity: Strawson still insists that a “full description at the purely experiential level of description will require the distinction between experiencer and experience (or experiential content). . . . If there is an experience of pain, then there must obviously be someone or something that feels the pain. There cannot be just an experiential content” (Strawson 2010, 131–133). Coleman, however, appears to deny precisely this last point.

10 Ibid.


12 Zahavi 2011, 60.

13 Zahavi 2011, 59. Notably, unlike Strawson, Zahavi is not committed to the existence of subjects per se; it suffices for him that there exist subjectivity. This distinction will be irrelevant to the current discussion, however.

14 Of course, you still might not know whether you are Twin A or Twin B (even though you are, in fact, Twin A). For a compelling argument that Perfect Twins who know they are Perfect Twins should be skeptical as to which Perfect Twin they are, see Elga 2004. Nevertheless, ISP at least prevents any confusion over whether you are the Perfect Twin that you are, whichever one that turns out to be.


16 Zahavi 2011, 59.

17 The non-relational ones, anyway: if, say, X is to the left of Y, then X has a property Y cannot possibly have. Of course, Y could, counterfactually, have the property of being to the left of X, although it is an open question whether (in a Max Black–style two-paint-chip universe) X and Y could both be “to the left of each other.” In any event, I am not sure how much this point matters to the current discussion.

18 A trope-theoretic approach to qualitative properties might avoid this problem, of course, but only at the
expense of any appeal to the in-principle duplicability of qualities. And if qualities need not (indeed, on trope theory, cannot) be duplicable, the received wisdom that all phenomenology is qualitative seems beside the point: truly qualitatively identical Perfect Twins will just be an impossibility. In any event, it is unlikely that many will be moved to adopt trope theory simply in order to avoid the problem outlined here—though it would be a most interesting consequence if some did!

20 Kriegel 2005, 47.
21 Famously deployed in Dretske 1995.
22 Zahavi 2011, 68.
23 E.g., be identical to, supervenient on, otherwise derivative from, etc.
24 See Rosencrantz 1993.
25 See, e.g., Tye 2002.
27 Schechtman 2014, 37.
28 Zahavi 2011, 61.
29 Nagel 1986, 37.