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For-me-ness, for-us-ness, and the we-relationship

Felipe León¹

1 Introduction

The proposal that any conscious mental state is distinctively presented to the subject who undergoes it, and that this distinctiveness is linked to the state's first-personal character has attracted increasing attention in discussions about phenomenal consciousness. This has happened in the context of a greater appreciation of the different aspects of phenomenality. It has been argued that not only is there a difference between what it is like to see blue and what it is like to see yellow, but also between what it is like to see blue and, say, what it is like to imagine blue. Further, cutting across differences in content and attitude, there is the phenomenal property of there being something it is like *for me* to have the experiences I have (Kriegel 2011b, forthcoming; Zahavi 2005, 2014; Zahavi and Kriegel 2016; Williford 2015). The 'for me' aspect of phenomenal character has been characterized as an implicit, pre-reflective and non-thematic aspect of each experience *qua* conscious state, insofar as its presence doesn't depend on a linguistic articulation, reflective appropriation or thematization of the experience in question. As distinguished from the qualitative character of experience, for-me-ness captures the 'subjective character' of experience (Kriegel 2005: 23, 2011b: 1; Levine 2001: 7).

The topic of for-me-ness raises a host of far-reaching questions, some of which concern its proper characterization, pervasiveness, phenomenal reality, and its relation to the prospects of providing a naturalistic account of consciousness.² Amongst the many issues that have been and are being discussed, one question that has attracted attention from some philosophers and psychologists concerns the relationship between for-me-ness and sociality. Critics who engage with this line of questioning are generally not willing to deny the reality of for-me-ness, but rather claim that for-me-ness is in some sense fundamentally determined

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² For some recent discussions, see (Guillot 2017; Garfield 2016; Schear 2009; Dainton 2016; Zahavi 2019; Zahavi and Kriegel 2016; Kriegel 2005, 2011a).

by social interactions. The proposal that there is a very tight link between subjectivity and sociality is certainly not new in the philosophical and psychological literature, but a novel feature of some of the recent criticisms to the received understanding of for-me-ness is that they don't appeal to language, narratives, social roles or cultural context, but rather to developmental psychology (Ciaunica and Fotopoulou 2017; Ciaunica 2016; Fotopoulou and Tsakiris 2017; Kyselo 2016; de Haan 2010) and psychopathology (Ratcliffe 2017).

My aim in the following is to discuss the relationship between for-me-ness and sociality, mainly in the context of recent criticisms to the received understanding of for-me-ness that have appealed to research in developmental psychology. I start out in Section 2 by pointing out some ambiguities in claims pursued by critics that have recently pressed on the relationship between for-me-ness and sociality. I next articulate a question concerning this relationship that builds on the idea that, occasionally at least, there is something it is like 'for us' to have an experience (Section 3). This idea has been explored in recent literature on shared experiences and collective intentionality (Schmid 2014a, 2014b; León, Szanto and Zahavi 2017), and it gestures towards the question of the extent to which some social interactions make a difference in the phenomenal character of their participants' experiences. In Section 4, I present a construal of for-us-ness that complements the received understanding of for-me-ness, by drawing on Alfred Schutz' concept of the we-relationship (Schutz 1967, 1962; Schutz and Luckmann 1973), and on the idea of second-personal awareness, i.e. awareness of a 'you', as distinguished from awareness of a 'she' or 'he'. This proposal, I suggest, provides a suitable account of some basic forms of phenomenally manifest social connectedness, in a way that is cognitively undemanding and without incurring the theoretical costs of positing a *sui generis* plural pre-reflective self-awareness (Schmid 2014a).

2 For-me-ness, minimal selfhood, and the challenge of sociality

The reservations that some authors have had with for-me-ness start with the very intelligibility of this notion, when understood along the lines of its main proponents. Discussing the proposal that all experiences are pre-reflectively self-conscious, and characterized by a "quality of mineness", Daniel Hutto raises a question about what justifies the characterization of experiences in terms of "mineness" or "first-personal givenness" (Hutto 2008: 14). He remarks that both the thesis that experiences are characterized by 'felt mineness' and the opposite thesis that experiences are given anonymously presuppose a capacity for recognizing one's experiences and those of others. Although this capacity need

not be conceptual, it seems to presuppose the availability of “some appropriate contrast”. Otherwise, he writes, “it becomes even harder to make sense of what ‘felt mineness’ might consist in” (2008: 16). The critical observation here is not that for-me-ness presupposes the possession of intersubjectively acquired concepts for characterizing experiences, but rather that it is hard to make sense of the very notion of for-me-ness in non-contrastive terms, i.e. when ‘for me’ is not understood in contrast to ‘for you’, ‘for him’, ‘for her’, or more generally ‘not-for-me’.

A first point to make in response to Hutto is that this by itself doesn’t challenge the legitimacy of the notion of for-me-ness in capturing a phenomenally real aspect of experiences, but rather highlights some difficulties in conceptualizing that aspect. A second, more substantial consideration is that the notion of for-me-ness is intended to capture an aspect of experiences that is non-criterially present in experiential states, i.e. its obtaining does not depend on the satisfaction of conditions different from the mere existence of the experiential state in question. This point is important, I think, because if the idea of an “appropriate contrast” is intended to provide, at least partly, a criterion for the ascription of for-me-ness, the latter notion would be deprived of something crucial. Moreover, as Zahavi and Gallagher point out (2008: 93), another problem with Hutto’s characterization is that it suggests that for-me-ness is felt as a specific content of experience. The misunderstanding is implicit not only in descriptions of for-me-ness that refer to it as the “quality of ‘mineness’”, but also in descriptions that cash it out in terms of “the idea that experiences have the quality of feeling to be ‘mine’” (Hutto and Ilundáin-Agurruza forthcoming: 18). These ways of describing for-me-ness motivate the idea that the latter is a quality that the experience is felt as having, instead of capturing the experience’s mode of being.³

But why, one might ask, should we accept the idea that for-me-ness is non-criterially present in experiential states, as a built-in feature of them? At least part of the answer to this question is that adopting this approach provides for a theory of the subjective character of phenomenal consciousness that is not affected by the problems of rival theories of consciousness, most notably by higher-order representationalism (Rosenthal 2002; Carruthers 2000; Zahavi 2005 Ch. 1; Kriegel 2011b Ch. 4). The difficulty is also explanatory in nature. If

³ Challenging the idea that “experiences in-themselves” can be characterized “in terms of feelings of ‘mineness’ or ‘first-personal givenness’” without appeal to intersubjectively acquired concepts, Hutto and Ilundáin-Agurruza ask: “what entitles us to employ these sorts of characterization in describing the felt character of such experiences to experiencers who lack the ability to make such conceptual distinctions?” (forthcoming: 19) This line of questioning seems to leave unexplained, though, what would entitle us to talk of experiencers in the first place.

for-me-ness is an aspect that individuates experiences *qua* experiences, the idea of appropriately contrasting the experiences with something else presupposes the individuation of the experience to be contrasted, i.e. it presupposes for-me-ness. Needless to say, this understanding of for-me-ness differs from how we ordinarily use and understand the expression ‘for me’ or words such as ‘mine’, ‘yours’, etc. Relatedly, there is in this sense a fundamental disanalogy between the ‘ownership’ indicated by for-me-ness, and the everyday use of ‘ownership’, which presupposes at least the possibility of not-ownership, in that the possibility of an ‘unowned’ (conscious) experience is ruled out by the conception of for-me-ness at stake here.

Let us now move to some of the critics of for-me-ness that have drawn on developmental psychology to support the idea that for-me-ness is fundamentally determined by social interactions.⁴ Fotopolou and Tsakiris draw on research in developmental psychology to argue that “social interactions do not shape only the reflective (narrative or extended) self and related notions of affect regulation and social cognition. Instead, the most minimal aspects of selfhood, namely the feeling of being an embodied, agentive subject, are fundamentally shaped by embodied interactions with other people in early infancy and beyond.” (Fotopoulou and Tsakiris 2017: 6). In a similar vein, Ciaunica and Fotopoulou seek to go beyond the dichotomy between experiential minimalism and social constructivism by focusing on forms of “proximal intersubjectivity” that are not necessarily mediated by visual perception, and by investigating the “mentalization” of interoceptive signals. ‘Mentalization’ is here understood as a process of integration of sensorimotor signals that generates models of an individual’s states in a specific environment.⁵ Importantly, the process of ‘mentalization’ is said to encompass signals that originate in the individual’s body but also in any body in physical proximity and social interaction. On this view, the origin of for-me-ness can be traced back to how an individual ‘mentalizes’ sensorimotor signals coming from heterogeneous sources.

⁴ Although some of these critics discuss minimal selfhood and not for-me-ness, I will make in the following the important assumption that the two notions are co-referential (Zahavi forthcoming: 9, 2014: 88). I take it that when the critics address the most basic aspects of selfhood and subjectivity, the strongest and most interesting way to understand their claim is as targeting for-me-ness. It is of course an open possibility to deny that the notions of for-me-ness and minimal selfhood capture the same phenomenon. However, a consequence of this denial would be that the aspects of minimal selfhood discussed by the critics would not speak to the idea that for-me-ness is fundamentally determined by social interactions.

⁵ The model of a state is understood in this context along the lines of the free energy framework, as a probabilistic and inferential model that is updated according to the incoming information to the system (Friston 2010; Fotopoulou and Tsakiris 2017: 7).

However, in spite of all the empirical evidence supporting the claim that we are critically embedded in intersubjective relations from the outset of life (also before birth), and that these relations are fundamental for survival and the maintenance and regulation of homeostasis, it isn't clear what precise target the critics are after. Sometimes it seems that they want to go beyond the contrast between experiential minimalism and social constructivism by offering a new conceptualization of for-me-ness. For example, Ciaunica and Fotopoulou write that they "aim to argue in favor of a reconceptualization of minimal selfhood that transcends such debates [between experiential minimalism and social constructivism] and instead traces the relational origins of the self to fundamental principles and regularities of the human embodied condition, which includes social, embodied interactions and practices" (Ciaunica and Fotopoulou, 2017: 174). At other times, however, it seems that the idea is not to sidestep the debate between experiential minimalism and social constructivism by reconceptualizing the notion of for-me-ness, but rather to argue that the received notion of for-me-ness aims to capture a phenomenon that is as such fundamentally determined by intersubjective relations. In this context, they talk of the "formation", "constitution" and the "foundations" of the minimal self (Ciaunica and Fotopoulou 2017: 180, 181, 182) in intersubjective relations.

I think, however, that there is a choice to be made here. It is one thing to 'go beyond' the dichotomy between experiential minimalism and social constructivism by offering a new conceptualization of for-me-ness, and it is another thing to argue that the received notion of for-me-ness captures a phenomenon that is socially determined. I take it that the spirit of the criticism is not merely to offer a new conceptualization of for-me-ness, but rather to develop a version of social constructivism that targets the received understanding of it. On closer inspection, though, the idea that for-me-ness is socially constructed can be understood in two ways: as a causal claim and as a constitutive claim. And while some research in developmental psychology might provide support for the idea that sociality causally influences and modulates for-me-ness, it doesn't by itself support the idea that the latter is partly or wholly constituted by sociality. No matter how proximal, intense, or frequent social interactions are, particularly in early stages of human life, as long as what they do is to modulate, shape or affect phenomenal consciousness and for-me-ness, they would fall short of constituting the latter. This is because the difference between causally influencing and modulating, on the one hand, and constituting, on the other, is not a matter of degree. Unless

one argues for an alternative understanding of them, they are different types of relations (Ylikoski, 2013; Bennett, 2011).⁶

Interestingly, proponents of for-me-ness have explicitly stated that for-me-ness is *per se* fully compatible with a radical social constructivist position about the causal explanation of it, such as the one offered by Wolfgang Prinz (Zahavi and Kriegel 2016: 39; see Prinz 2003, 2017). Although this compatibility does not speak in favour of the plausibility of such a causal explanation, its recognition is important, because it helps to dissipate one source of tension between some versions of social constructivism and defenders of for-me-ness. At the same time, however, the point raises the question of what a convincing social-constructivist causal explanation of for-me-ness could look like, something that is quite far from clear.⁷

But given its minimalist character, what would it mean to say that for-me-ness is modulated by social factors? I propose that even if developmental evidence does not support constitutive claims about for-me-ness, this doesn't preclude that *subjective character* is affected in important ways by some social interactions. Admittedly, the viability of this proposal depends on operating with a notion of subjective character that is broader than for-me-ness, on the received understanding of the latter. And while I cannot unpack and defend this idea in full here, I will motivate it by suggesting that some social interactions make a difference in phenomenal character that goes beyond differences in qualitative character. On the assumption that qualitative character and subjective character are what phenomenal character consists in, we would have a *prima facie* reason to hold that some social interactions make a difference in the subjective character of experiences.

One of the starting points of several current debates about shared experiences and collective intentionality is the contrast between social experiences that one has together with other subjects and experiences that subjects have in parallel or as an aggregate of individuals (Schweikard and Schmid 2013). And whereas there is much debate about the nature of sharing and jointness in the case of shared intentions, beliefs, and, more recently, emotions (Schmid, 2009 Ch. 4; Krueger 2016; Zahavi 2015b; León, Szanto and Zahavi 2017; Szanto 2015) and perceptual experiences (Eilan, Hoerl, McCormack, and Roessler 2005; Seemann 2011), there is an increasing appreciation that phenomenality is not left untouched by some social interactions, and that experiential sharing involves more than qualitatively similar or

⁶ Perhaps one possible move to make here, congenial to enactivist and extended approaches to cognition, would be to put pressure on a too strong distinction between causation and constitution (Kirchhoff 2015). However, the pertinence of that denial in the present context would have to be made explicit and substantiated.

⁷ For further discussion of recent criticisms to for-me-ness and minimal selfhood that focus on the issue of sociality, see (Zahavi 2010, 2014: 85, 2016, 2017; Zahavi and Rochat 2017).

matching experiences. There is something intuitively and theoretically compelling in supposing that in cases of shared experiences, such as joint attention and shared emotions, but also in the phenomenology of joint action (Tollefsen 2014), there is something it is like ‘for us’ to have the experiences that we have, or to do the things that we do together with others. For example, in the case of triadic joint attention, this proposal provides a clarification of the experiential “shift” between solitary and joint attention, that allows co-attenders with the requisite cognitive capacities to respond rationally in joint attention situations (see Campbell 2005: 288, 2011).⁸

The relevance of experiences had together —as distinguished from those had in parallel— with other subjects need not be exclusively related to cognitively demanding situations. Developmental psychologists have long argued that human beings engage in shared experiences from very early in life (and plausibly even before birth), mainly through mutually coordinated dyadic affective experiences and, later, triadic joint attention with their caregivers (Trevarthen 1979; Trevarthen and Hubley 1978; Trevarthen 1998). Some researchers have also argued that infants have a propensity to share experiences with others independently of the outcomes that joint activities may have, or even if the joint activities don’t have a clear outcome at all (Carpenter and Liebal 2011: 163). The phenomenon of what might be called ‘sharing for the sake of sharing’ suggests that from early on in life humans find something intrinsically valuable in sharing experiences with others, an idea that can be related to the documented critical role that a sense of connection with others has for socio-cognitive development (Tronick 2004; Spitz 1977).

The point that I would like to highlight is that if social connectedness is experientially manifest, this manifestation may not only be a matter of the contents of experiences, of what is experienced, but rather of *how* it is experienced by the participants in a social interaction. The thought here is that shared experiences are had by their subjects in a way that importantly differs from non-shared, solitary experiences. One could say, along these lines, that a focus on

⁸ Campbell thinks of the shift in question primarily as a change in the functional role of the experience, insofar as being part of a joint attention relation opens up new action possibilities, but he also acknowledges that joint attention is not exhausted by its functional roles (Campbell 2005: 294). A classic example of an action possibility enabled by joint attention is the ‘coordinated attack’ scenario. On one version of it, it involves two subjects, A and B, who are playing a war game displayed on a screen in front of them. A and B are allies and, according to the rules of the game, if they attack the same target, a limited payoff is guaranteed, whereas, if either attacks a target without the other attacking the same target, the outcome is disaster. Campbell remarks that, in an ordinary situation, it is perfectly possible for A and B to attack the same target. Their joint attention to the same target is out in the open for both of them: “[y]ou point and I nod. Straightway we hit the buttons” (Campbell 2011: 417). Campbell’s critical point is that no *n* level of iterative common knowledge is sufficient to rationalize the coordinated attack. He proposes that it is in virtue of being responsive to the three-place experiential relation of joint attention that the co-attenders can be successful in attacking the same target. For a recent discussion of the coordinated attack scenario, see Blomberg (forthcoming).

interoception, affective touch (Ciaunica and Fotopoulou 2017; Ciaunica 2016), and pre-reflective forms of sociality (de Haan 2010) in early social relations, indicates that we need to better understand how the subjective character of conscious experience allows for a sense of social connectedness that is experientially manifest in cognitively undemanding ways. However, this line of inquiry should be distinguished from the claims that for-me-ness is socially constituted, or that the notion of for-me-ness should be reconceptualized in social terms.

It seems plausible to suppose that for massively social creatures like us, social togetherness and the difference between social and non-social interactions are registered in phenomenal character. It is therefore somewhat surprising that research on phenomenal consciousness in analytic philosophy of mind has not engaged with sociality as a factor that modulates some specific types of phenomenology.⁹ But how plausible is it to suppose that some social interactions make a difference in the subjective character of their participants' experiences that goes beyond differences in experiential content? How can we understand the alleged 'for us' component of phenomenal character, and how should its relation with for-me-ness be conceptualized? Before addressing these questions, there is a preliminary issue to be considered. One might say, in fact, that whatever for-us-ness turns out to be, raising the question of its relationship with for-me-ness as if the two notions could be on equal ground involves a misunderstanding of the role that the latter notion has played in discussions about phenomenal consciousness. After all, for-me-ness is taken to single out the distinctive character of a conscious state vis-à-vis a non-conscious one (Kriegel 2011b: 73). As such, for-me-ness has been taken to be "the mark of the conscious" (Kriegel forthcoming: 11), and the existential condition of phenomenal consciousness (Kriegel 2011b: 11).

Concededly, this raises some pressure for motivating a sufficiently robust question about the relationship between for-me-ness and for-us-ness. If for-me-ness is critical in understanding phenomenal consciousness, and the latter is the property responsible for the puzzle of the 'hard problem of consciousness', and for the "sense of the mystery" about what consciousness is (Kriegel 2011b: 3), isn't a question about the relationship between for-me-ness and for-us-ness somewhat misplaced? My response is that there is no reason why we should assume that there is only one puzzle about phenomenal consciousness. Inquiring into the relationship between for-me-ness and for-us-ness broadens the spectrum of discussion on for-me-ness, and opens up consideration of another, considerable unexplored, puzzle about

⁹ Most notably, the topic seems to be absent in Kriegel's rich and detailed treatment (2015).

consciousness, motivated by research in developmental psychology and debates about collective intentionality, namely how individual minds can be joined together (Tomasello, 2014: 152; Hobson 2002; Reddy 2008; Moll and Meltzoff 2011a), or how a “meeting of minds” is possible (Bruner 1995: 6).

3 For-us-ness and mutual awareness of co-presence

Of which types of experiences can it be said that there is something it is like ‘for us’ to have them?¹⁰ The intuitions of philosophers may differ here significantly. But, broadly speaking, one can distinguish at least two routes to tackle this question. The first one is to opt for a narrow understanding of for-us-ness, according to which the latter involves a feeling of unification, togetherness (Walther 1923: 33), and potential or actual cooperation. Along these lines, a paradigmatic example of an experience characterized by for-us-ness would be Max Scheler’s example of two parents grieving in front of their son’s corpse (Scheler 2008: 13).¹¹ One could say, following some of Scheler’s suggestions, that from the parents’ perspective the experience of grief is not given to each of them, individually, but is rather given to them as ‘ours’. A second strategy is to opt for a broader understanding of for-us-ness. On this view, even if present in a case such as the one described by Scheler, for-us-ness would also be present in situations in which there is no feeling of unification involved, but in which there is still a specific structure of interpersonal awareness. For-us-ness would be present in, say, situations of dyadic and triadic joint attention, which need not involve a feeling-with-one-another or any sense of cooperation, but more simply a mutual awareness of co-presence and, eventually, of co-attending to an environmental object that may elicit different responses.

¹⁰ As far as I can see, the locution ‘for us’ in the context of discussions on phenomenal consciousness was introduced by Schmid, who writes: “In the case of shared feelings—shared grief, worries, and joys—there is a sense in which it is simply not the case that “I can’t really know how you feel,” because my feeling *is* your feeling, or rather: my feeling isn’t really mine, and yours isn’t yours, but *ours*. Shared feelings are conscious experiences whose subjective aspect is not singular (“for me”), but plural (“for us”)” (Schmid 2014b: 9).

¹¹ “The father and the mother stand beside the dead body of a beloved child. They feel in common the ‘same’ sorrow, the ‘same’ anguish. It is not that A feels this sorrow and B feels it also, and moreover that they both know they are feeling it. No, it is a *feeling-in-common*. A’s sorrow is in no way ‘objectual’ for B here, as it is, e.g. for their friend C, who joins them, and commiserates ‘with them’ or ‘upon their sorrow’. On the contrary, they feel it together, in the sense that they feel and experience in common, not only the self-same value-situation, but also the same keenness of emotion in regard to it. The sorrow, as value-content, and the grief, as characterizing the functional relation thereto, are here *one and identical*”. (Scheler 2008, pp. 12–13, translation modified)

I don't think there is a principled way of adjudicating between these two strategies, but I will in the following explore the second one. My reason for doing this is that whereas one might plausibly consider how to restrict a broader notion of for-us-ness in order to capture increasingly demanding and specific forms of it, it isn't *prima facie* clear how to make the way backwards, starting with the narrower notion and trying to expand it subsequently to cover less demanding phenomena. Additionally, opting for the second option may allow for the development of theoretical tools to investigate some of the early-developing phenomena that have been of interest for several philosophers and psychologists, such as dyadic and triadic joint attention. If such early interactions involve for-us-ness, on a plausible construal of this notion, we risk missing out on something important by starting with a more narrow and demanding notion.

I propose, therefore, that, at a minimal level, experiences are characterized by for-us-ness when they involve, for the participating individuals, a mutual awareness of their co-presence in the spatio-temporal segment of reality in which they are located. This need not involve any articulated, linguistically or reflectively mediated understanding on the part of the involved individuals. And, admittedly, while this is a broad characterization of for-us-ness, note that it is not too broad. Mere co-presence is not sufficient, since two subjects may be located in roughly the same place at the same time without being aware of that. Likewise, awareness *simpliciter* of co-presence is not enough, since one subject may be aware of being located in the same place and time as another without the second being aware of this. The two subjects may even be coincidentally aware of one another, without their awareness being mutual in the relevant sense. What is required is that their awareness is mutual in the sense that, as we may say, it is 'out in the open' for both of them that they are so aware.

But what is the relevant notion of mutuality? While it might seem natural to think of this mutuality in terms of bi-directionality, there is a difficulty in taking this route. The problem is that once we try to understand mutual awareness between subjects A and B in terms of a complex interrelation between states of awareness such as: (i) A is aware of B, (ii) B is aware of A, there doesn't seem to be any reason to stop here. On the contrary, mutual awareness seems also to demand that (iii) A is aware that B is aware of A, and that (iv) B is aware that A is aware of B, and so forth and so on. One might argue that the ensuing infinite regress can be stopped by taking the awareness at stake as dispositional. A similar strategy has been occasionally applied to tackle a related problem in the analysis of the epistemic phenomenon of common knowledge (Schiffer 1972: 32; Lewis, 2002; Vanderschraaf and Sillari 2014). But this is not convincing in the present context, because the mutual awareness

at stake, the ‘for-us-ness’ component in situations of mutual awareness of co-presence, does not seem to be a dispositional phenomenon. It is something immediate and occurrent in the consciousness of the participating individuals, similarly to the ‘openness’ that characterizes joint attention.¹² Several researchers who adopt a ‘rich’ interpretation of triadic joint attention accept the constraint that the latter constitutively involves mutual awareness or openness about being engaged in joint attention, i.e. an awareness of attending together.¹³ According to a widely held characterization, triadic joint attention is not parallel attention, gaze following, or gaze alternation (including social referencing) but a triadic perceptual relation between subjects X and Y and object O, where it is constitutive of the joint attention situation that its occurrence is out in the open or mutually manifest to X and Y.

Summing up, if situations of mutual awareness of co-presence are experientially manifest to the individuals partaking in them, and if appealing to a complex web of reciprocal and iterated states of awareness is not compelling to clarify this, we are left with the question of how to understand the phenomenally manifest mutuality of such situations.

A related worry was raised by Eugen Fink in an exchange with Alfred Schutz in 1957. While discussing some aspects of Schutz’ account of sociality, Fink points out that the reciprocal relation involved in the experience of the other in face-to-face situations “allows, potentially, infinite reiteration”, although this potentiality “need not be actualized”. Fink then raises the question of whether “on the whole, the reciprocal relationship involved in the encounter of two subjects - this reciprocity of facing and objectivating the Other - suffices even to clarify the immediacy of understanding by which the existence of the Other is apprehended in shared situations (*Unmittelbarkeit des Verstehens des Mitdaseins mit dem Anderen*)” (quoted in Schutz 1970: 85). In his response to Fink, Schutz states that “it cannot be doubted that this reciprocal relation in the encounter of ego and alter ego is not sufficient to account for the immediacy in which the co-existence with the Other is apprehended in such a situation” (Schutz 1970: 88). I take it that Schutz’ suggestion here is that reciprocated states of awareness are not illuminating for understanding the ‘openness’ of some basic forms of

¹² As Naomi Eilan writes, “[t]here is something utterly simple and basic about the transparency of our minds to each other in the case of joint attention which this whole account [Schiffer’s] misses. The very idea that we have to iterate beliefs *ad infinitum* in order to capture the phenomenon of mutual awareness only gets going because of an assumption of basic opacity as a starting point” (Eilan 2005: 3).

¹³ “It is constitutive of the phenomenon [of joint attention] that when it occurs its occurrence is mutually manifest to the co-attenders” (Eilan, 2015, p. 1); “when joint attention occurs everything about the fact that both subjects are attending to the same object is out in the open, manifest to both participants” (Eilan, 2005, p. 1); “whatever else is true of it, joint attention has an ‘openness’ about it - there’s some sense in which the situation is ‘open’ to both attendees in a case of joint attention” (Campbell 2011: 417); “when there is full joint awareness between subjects, there is awareness of full joint awareness” (Peacocke 2005: 303); See also (Carpenter and Liebal 2011: 160; Schilbach 2015: 132; Moll and Meltzoff 2011b: 290).

interpersonal encounters. And, although Schutz doesn't expand on this point, he refers to the issue of temporality and the synchronicity of the we-relationship, to which I will turn in the next section. I will suggest that we can understand the mutual character of mutual awareness of co-presence by taking into consideration Schutz' concept of the we-relationship, and the idea of second-personal awareness, i.e. awareness of a 'you', as distinguished from awareness of a 'she' or 'he'.

On the proposal that I will present, interpersonal understanding plays a role in understanding what for-us-ness amounts to. This stands in contrast to some arguments put forward by H. B. Schmid to downplay the relevance of social cognition for an understanding of for-us-ness, or the 'sense of us'.¹⁴ First, Schmid argues that the attempt to approach for-us-ness through some appeal to interpersonal understanding must rely on some form of iterative common knowledge that inevitably leads to an infinite regress (Schmid 2005: 124). Secondly, Schmid suggests that relying on social cognition in an analysis of for-us-ness involves a questionable reductive move that loses sight of what is distinctive about the latter, namely being together with others as something different from a mere aggregate or summation of individual attitudes furnished with for-me-ness and supplemented by interpersonal understanding (Schmid 2015: 113). His suggestion is that such a supplementation is going to inevitably fall short of accounting for the jointness of for-us-ness.

I am not convinced by either line of argument. In the first place, the openness of situations characterized my mutual awareness of co-presence, such as joint attention (i.e. the sense in which the joint attention situation is 'for us', co-attenders) shouldn't be conflated with the epistemic phenomenon of common knowledge (Peacocke 2005: 299, 301; Campbell 2005: 295). Secondly, I suggest that rejecting the relevance of interpersonal understanding for understanding for-us-ness might be a premature move. Not every form of interpersonal understanding is deemed to be part of a questionable attempt to reduce for-us-ness to individuals' attitudes characterized by for-me-ness and supplemented by social cognition. Indeed, I will explore in the next section the idea that for some of an individual's mental states there is a form of social cognition, as it were, built into the having of the state — and not merely as a supplementation to it. I contend that this, in turn, is an important step for clarifying the relationship between for-me-ness and for-us-ness.

¹⁴ To be fair, Schmid does not discuss mutual awareness of co-presence. I am extrapolating and adapting arguments of his to the case at hand.

4 The we-relationship and second-personal awareness

Schutz' account of social reality is based on the idea that the latter is heterogeneous and structured in complex ways. Part of this complexity is linked to the fact that other subjects are given "in different degrees of anonymity, experiential immediacy, and fulfilment" (Schutz 1967: 8). In what Schutz calls the social surrounding world, a subject experiences other subjects in "face-to-face encounters", directly perceiving them as partaking in the same spatio-temporal reality (Schutz 1967: 162). At the basis of the face-to-face encounter is what Schutz calls a "you-attitude" or "you-orientation", that is, "the intentionality of those acts whereby the Ego grasps the existence of the other person in the mode of the original self" (Schutz, 1967: 164), or "the general form in which another is experienced in person" (Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 62). The you-attitude is originally pre-predicative (Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 62), in the sense of being prior to any acts of judgment about the other. Neither is it the result of an act of reflection, but instead a primitive grasp of the other's existence in spatio-temporal immediacy (Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 62). There is a certain formality in the Schutzian you-attitude, in the sense that this attitude does not require the possession of knowledge about the other's specific manner of being (Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 62). Moreover, according to Schutz, there is nothing in the you-attitude as such that requires the target of attention to be aware of being attended to. Consequently, Schutz allows for a non-reciprocal, or unilateral, you-attitude (Schutz 1967: 146; Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 62). However, when two (or more) individuals engage in a reciprocal you-orientation, they form a "we-relationship" or a "living social relationship" (Schutz 1967: 156-157).

Now, I think that there is one aspect of Schutz' proposal that requires adjustment, and two points that are worth of some considerations. The proposed adjustment concerns one aspect of Schutz' notion of the you-orientation. While highlighting the role of reciprocity in the we-relationship, Schutz also allows for a non-reciprocal you-orientation, thereby endorsing the view that reciprocity is not a necessary feature of that orientation. This runs counter to the proposal that what is distinctive in relating to another subject as a you is precisely the fact of being a you for the other (Zahavi 2015a: 157; Litt 1926: 106). Understanding second-personal or you-awareness as inherently reciprocal means that awareness of a you is *eo ipso* awareness of oneself as a you for the other. Or, to put it differently, second-personal other-awareness is at the same time second-personal *self*-awareness. Leaving aside ongoing discussions about the nature of the second person (Eilan

2014; Reddy 2008; Schilbach et al., 2013), I will adopt here the view that at least part of the distinctiveness of relating to a 'you' is the reciprocal character of the relation.

The two points worth of consideration are the following. First, Schutz discussion of the face-to-face situation as the most basic form of interpersonal experience seems to overemphasize the role of vision and spatial separation between the participants in the we-relationship. This is not congenial to developmental evidence that convincingly highlights the role of affective touch in developmentally early social encounters (Ciaunica and Fotopoulou 2017: 183). I don't think, though, that this should cast doubts on the theoretical reach of the Schutzian we-relationship. What this indicates, instead, is that we need to have a more flexible understanding of what the 'face-to-face' situation and the we-relationship amount to. In fact, there doesn't seem to be anything in the notion of the we-relationship as such ruling out the involvement of non-visual sensory modalities, or its distribution across different sensory modalities. The second point is that, according to Schutz, the we-relationship is present not only in adulthood, but also in early childhood. Also for the child who is engaged in a we-relationship "[w]hat is given are the immediacy of the experience of the Other and the reciprocal attentional advertence", even if the child's "personal self" is not developed yet (Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 245). The fact that Schutz allows for developmentally early forms of the we-relationship speaks in favour of the relevance of this notion for current discussions.

These observations about Schutz' proposal are useful in order to make the idea of the we-relationship more precise. More specifically, the we-relationship can be characterized as a pre-reflective you-awareness in spatio-temporal proximity. The we-relationship is pre-reflective in the sense that each 'you' taking part in it is not an object of thought for the other. As Schutz puts it, "the more I reflect, the more my partner becomes transformed into a mere object of thought" (Schutz 1967: 167). And it is strongly relational in the sense that, while taking part in a we-relationship, both of *us* are simultaneously aware of being experienced or attended to by the other.

Moreover, according to Schutz the we-relationship is characterized by an "interlocking" of experiences, and this interlocking depends on what he calls "the general thesis of the alter ego" (Schutz 1962: 174). In order to clarify this thesis, some preliminary comments are in order. Schutz endorses the idea that self-reflection is always *post facto*, in the sense that it is directed to an experience that has already lapsed. However, in an unfolding we-relationship each subject has a simultaneous access to those aspects of the other's experiential life that are present in the other's expressive behaviour and actions. Phrased in I-

you terms, in the we-relationship, I am pre-reflectively aware of my experience and of being experienced by you, where such an awareness involves, simultaneously, that you are self-aware in the same way with respect to me. Importantly, Schutz suggests that if we take seriously the idea that we have an experiential access to (some aspects of) other minds, and that this direct access is grounded in a synchronicity of the streams of consciousness, we shouldn't maintain that the epistemic asymmetry between the first-person and the second-person perspective entails that the access I have to your experience is somehow secondary or parasitic when compared to the access you have to your own experience. Quite to the contrary, my perspective on you and your experiences is to some extent privileged in that I can be thematically aware of the latter as they unfold pre-reflectively, whereas you cannot be thematically aware of your own experiences prior to reflecting upon them (1967: 102, 169). As Schutz points out, "I have never been face to face with myself as I am with him now; hence I have never caught myself in the act of actually living an experience" (Schutz 1967: 169).

These considerations lead Schutz to define the *alter ego* in terms of its accessibility. As he writes, the "fact that I can grasp the Other's stream of thought, and this means the subjectivity of the alter ego in its vivid present, whereas I can grasp my own self only by way of reflection on its past, leads us to a definition of the alter ego: the alter ego is that subjective stream of thought which can be experienced in its vivid present. [...] This experience of the Other's stream of consciousness in vivid simultaneity I propose to call the *general thesis of the alter ego's existence*" (Schutz 1962: 174). Thus, running counter to sceptical concerns about our possibility to grasp other minds, the *alter ego* is positively defined by Schutz in terms of its accessibility, rather than its inaccessibility or transcendence.

It is important not to misunderstand this idea. Schutz's definition of the *alter ego* in terms of its accessibility is compatible with accepting the experiential and epistemic asymmetry between first-personal and non-first personal accesses to the mental (Schutz 1967: 20, 23ff). As Schutz points out, it doesn't make much sense to say that the access one has to someone else's intention through observing her expressive behaviour is direct in the same way in which the observed other has an access to her own intention. Instead, the Schutsonian definition of the *alter ego* in terms of accessibility is meant to capture a very thin notion of access, namely the idea that whereas reflective self-apprehension is always *post facto*, i.e. it apprehends an experience that has already lapsed, each subject partaking in an unfolding we-relationship has a simultaneous and synchronous access to those aspects of the other's experiential life that are expressed in the other's meaningful behaviour and actions. Such a

thin form of access may not grant a deep insight into the other's psychological life. And Schutz' proposal is certainly not that in relating to another in a we-relationship a subject would have a more detailed insight into the other's biographical information than he has of himself (Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 66). But it is still a form of access, notably one that is precluded for the other subject himself:

In so far as each of us can experience the Other's thoughts and acts in the vivid present whereas either can grasp his own only as a past by way of reflection, I know more of the Other and he knows more of me than either of us knows of his own stream of consciousness. This present, common to both of us, is the pure sphere of the 'We'. [...] We participate without an act of reflection in the vivid simultaneity of the 'We' (Schutz 1962: 175).

One idea that can be drawn from these considerations is that each partner in a we-relationship has a distinctive access to the other, a type of access that is in principle foreclosed to the other. The suggestion here is not that second-personal self-awareness replaces first-personal self-awareness, but rather that, given a certain conception of basic forms of interpersonal understanding as embodied and embedded practices, some face-to-face or proximal encounters generate an interlocking of the ways in which subjects have experiences of each other. And although synchronicity might be sufficient to secure the mutuality of the we-relationship, further ammunition for Schutz' view comes from his endorsement of a conception of basic forms of interpersonal understanding that highlights the presence of an experiential and unmediated access to some aspects of other subjects' psychological lives (Gallagher 2008; Krueger 2012; León and Zahavi 2016; León 2013; Zahavi 2011). After all, it is coherent with the idea that there is a form of understanding other minds that is strictly speaking experiential that when this type of understanding is mutual, each subject is pre-reflectively aware of her mental state and simultaneously aware of its being experienced by the other. This is precisely what happens in the we-relationship.

Let us now go back to for-us-ness and mutual awareness of co-presence. How does the Schutzian we-relationship help to explain the mutual character of mutual awareness of co-presence? A first thing to note is that the we-relationship is in line with the broad understanding of for-us-ness that I introduced in the previous section. The we-relationship *per se* is not a cooperative endeavour in which the goals or appraisals of different subjects necessarily converge (Schutz 1962: 316), but rather provides a basis for more robust forms of

shared experiences. Secondly, the we-relationship involves, for each participating subject, a pre-reflective and non-thematic awareness of her experience as synchronously manifested to her and to the other subject. As a consequence, in being self-aware as a you, each subject modulates the way in which at least part of her experiential life is had. This suggests, in turn, that experiential states can be had not only in a first-personal way *simpliciter*, but also as second-personally presented to other subjects. For each participant in the we-relationship, the very having of some of her experiences, their subjective character, contains a reference to the presentation of the very same experience to another subject.

I contend that awareness of the complementarity between non-thematic and thematic forms of access to experiential states in the context of a we-relationship is one plausible way to understand the roots of basic forms of for-us-ness and social connectedness. In the first place, at the most basic level, second-personal awareness need not involve reflective capacities, perspective-taking, or an apprehension of how the other is seeing oneself, but merely an awareness of being attended to, or experienced in synchronicity by a you. Secondly, while acknowledging that for-us-ness is robust in the sense of making a difference in the subjective character of an experience, the current proposal takes distance from the idea of a plural pre-reflective self-awareness that would be primitive with respect to for-me-ness (Schmid 2014a; cf. León, Szanto and Zahavi 2017; Zahavi in press). In fact, on the current proposal, for-us-ness does not involve any “phenomenal fusion” (Schmid, 2009, p. 77) or the sharing of one token-identical experiential state between different subjects. Such a proposal leads to a number of difficulties that can be avoided by the current approach.¹⁵ Instead, for-me-ness and for-us-ness can be conceptualized as profiles or aspects of the subjective character of individuals’ experiences, and the articulation between these phenomenal profiles can be understood via the notion of second-personal (self-)awareness.

5 Concluding remarks

I started out this paper with a question about the relationship between for-me-ness and sociality, and I have suggested that one useful way of articulating this question is in terms of the relationship between for-me-ness and for-us-ness. Moreover, I have proposed and investigated a minimalist construal of for-us-ness, understood as mutual awareness of co-

¹⁵ One problem is how to account for inter-individual phenomenal differences if sharing involves one token-identical experiential episode. For a criticism of the token-identity view, see León, Szanto and Zahavi 2017.

presence. This construal of for-us-ness allows us to explain how social connectedness can be phenomenally manifest from early in life, without incurring the costs of a plural pre-reflective self-awareness, or a reduction of for-us-ness to for-me-ness. Drawing on Schutz' concept of the we-relationship, I have developed the idea that awareness of being experienced by a you in a face-to-face or proximal interaction makes a difference in self-consciousness. This is because in this type of social situation an occurrent and non-thematically self-conscious state is experienced as thematically and simultaneously attended to by another subject. While much more could be said about these topics, a greater appreciation of the complexities of the subjective character of experience may open new ways for exploring how the latter allows for a phenomenally manifest social connectedness.¹⁶

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