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## 1.2 FOR-ME-NESS: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

Dan Zahavi and Uriah Kriegel

### **Abstract**

The alleged for-me-ness or mineness of conscious experience has been the topic of considerable debate in recent phenomenology and philosophy of mind. By considering a series of objections to the notion of for-me-ness, or to a properly robust construal of it, this paper attempts to clarify to what the notion is committed and to what it is not committed. This exercise results in the emergence of a relatively determinate and textured portrayal of for-me-ness as the authors conceive of it.

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### **1. Introduction: Phenomenal Consciousness and For-me-ness**

Compare your experiences of perceiving an apple and remembering a banana. In one respect, these experiences are very different. They differ both with regard to their object or content and with regard to their act type or attitude. In another respect, however, the two experiences have something very fundamental in common: in both cases, it is *for you* that it is like something to have them. Arguably, for every possible experience that we have, each of us can say: whatever it is like for me to have the experience, it is *for me* that it is like that to have it. What-it-is-like-ness is properly speaking what-it-is-like-*for-me*-ness.

On our view, this for-me-ness is a universal feature of experience. Some philosophers maintain that this for-me-ness is a philosophical myth, with no psychological reality whatsoever. Others accept the existence of for-me-ness but do not think it is an essential or even universal characteristic of consciousness. We have argued for our view that it is universal and essential elsewhere (Kriegel 2003 and 2009; Zahavi 2000, 2005, 2011, and 2014) and will take it for granted here.

The for-me-ness of experience still admits of two crucially different interpretations. According to a deflationary interpretation, it consists simply in the experience *occurring* in someone (a 'me'). On this view, for-me-ness is a non-experiential aspect of mental life – a merely metaphysical fact, so to speak, not a phenomenological fact. The idea is that we ought to resist a no-ownership view according to which experiences can occur as free-floating unowned entities. Just as horse-riding presupposes the existence of a horse, experiencing presupposes a subject of experience. In contrast, a non-deflationary interpretation construes for-me-ness as an experiential aspect of mental life, a bona fide *phenomenal* dimension of consciousness. On this view, to say that an experience is *for me* is precisely to say something more than that it is *in me*. It is to state not only a metaphysical fact, but also a phenomenological fact. Here the relationship between experiencing and the subject goes deeper than that between horse-riding and the horse.

We favor a non-deflationary interpretation of the for-me-ness of experience; again, we have argued for it separately in various places.<sup>1</sup> Here our goal is relatively modest: to

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<sup>1</sup> See, again, Kriegel 2003 and 2009; Zahavi 2000, 2005, 2011, and 2014.

clarify certain commitments, and certain non-commitments, of the non-deflationary notion (or construal).

The non-deflationary conception of for-me-ness comes in a weaker and a stronger variety, depending on whether the central claim is construed as existential or universal. The weaker claim is that *sometimes* for-me-ness is an experiential dimension of phenomenal character. That is, there exists a phenomenal or experiential for-me-ness, manifest in some conscious states. More precisely:

(WC) Some conscious states' phenomenal character involves for-me-ness as an experiential constituent.

The stronger claim is that for-me-ness is *always* an experiential dimension of phenomenal character. That is, phenomenal or experiential for-me-ness is a universal aspect of conscious experience. There are no conscious states whose phenomenal character lacks for-me-ness. More precisely:

(SC) All conscious states' phenomenal character involves for-me-ness as an experiential constituent.

We are, as already mentioned, prepared to defend the stronger claim, but some of the objections we will consider target even the weaker claim, since some philosophers deny the very existence of a phenomenal or experiential for-me-ness. Others accept its existence, denying only its ubiquity in conscious experience.

## 2. Introspective Objections

The literature features two central introspectively based objections to experiential for-me-ness. The first targets specifically the 'me' part of for-me-ness, claiming that there simply is no introspective trace of an experiential self that could be built into conscious states. The second is more general and contends that the so-called transparency of experience undermines the notion of for-me-ness.

The first objection takes its cue from Hume's well-known introspective claim that "when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other... I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but a perception" (Hume 1740/1888, 252). Since there is no introspective trace of a self, a 'me,' a fortiori there can be no introspective trace of for-me-ness. Modern variations of this theme are quite rife in the literature (see Dainton 2004, 150, 242, 380; Bayne 2010, 286; Bermudez 2011, 162-5).

However, the existence of an experiential for-me-ness does not require there to be a detachable self quale that one could introspect in isolation from any other content of consciousness. Experiential for-me-ness is not a quality or datum of experience on a par with, say, the taste of lemon or the smell of crushed mint leaves. In fact, it is not supposed to be any specific qualitative content at all. Nor is it supposed to be a synchronic or diachronic sum of such contents (or any other relation that might obtain among such contents). Our view is not that in addition to the objects in one's experiential field – the books, computer screen, half-empty cup of coffee, and so on – there is also a *self-object*. Rather the point is that each of these objects, when experienced, is given to one in a distinctly first-personal way, and that this givenness is a pervasive dimension of

phenomenal life. On our view, one does not grasp for-me-ness by introspecting a self-standing quale, in the same way one grasps the taste of lemon or smell of mint. Rather, there is lemon-taste-for-me-ness, mint-smell-for-me-ness, and many other types of phenomenal character; one grasps such experiential elements as lemon-qualia and mint-qualia by appreciating what *varies across* such phenomenal characters, but grasps what for-me-ness is by appreciating what *remains constant* across them.<sup>2</sup> We can put this by saying that the ‘me’ of for-me-ness is not in the first instance an aspect of *what* is experienced but of *how* it is experienced; not an object of experience, but a constitutive manner of experiencing. To deny that such a feature is present in our experiential life, to deny the for-me-ness or mineness of experience, is to fail to recognize the very subjectivity of experience.

In this sense, experiential for-me-ness is fully consistent with the Humean observation that “I can never catch myself without a perception.” Since for-me-ness, as we conceive of it, is a feature of every experiential content without being a self-standing experiential content, there can be no conscious state consisting in nothing but for-me-ness. A consciousness without content but only for-me-ness is impossible. And yet once *anything* occurs consciously, it must be given to the subject and thus exhibit for-me-ness. In other words, the ‘me’ of for-me-ness is not a separate and distinct item but rather a pervasive feature of experiential life as such. Thus to hold that the Humean observation somehow undermines the notion of an experiential for-me-ness is to misunderstand that notion. When correctly understood, the view is fully compatible with the Humean observation (cf. Margolis 1988).

The same misconstrual of for-me-ness can be seen in neo-Humeans such as Jesse Prinz. Prinz does not deny that the self can be the *object* of conscious experience. What he denies is that it is phenomenally present qua *subject* of experience. In this same vein, Prinz does not deny that we can form judgments about ownership, or that there may be experiences on the basis of which we infer ownership; but there is, on his view, no experience of ownership, no mineness of experience (Prinz 2012, 140). Prinz argues for this by elimination, considering three options about the concrete elements of conscious experience: first, that among the concrete qualities of the experience there is a specific item that we can label ‘the I’; secondly, that there is an I-quale, but one that is reducible to other kinds of quale (such that the I-quale is nothing over and above the qualities of perception, sensation, and emotion); thirdly, that there is simply no I-quale. It is this final possibility that Prinz favors (Prinz 2012, 123-4). Interestingly, Prinz’s eliminativism must not be taken as a defense of an ontological antirealism about the self. Prinz is not arguing that consciousness is selfless. Rather, consciousness is, as he puts it, “thoroughly permeated by the self” (Prinz 2012, 149). We always experience the world from a perspective or point of view. Who we are, our goals, interests, and histories – all this very much filters and constrains what we experience. Thus, the self might be said to be present, not as an item of

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<sup>2</sup> Consider, by comparison, temporality. Temporality is a pervasive feature of all phenomenal consciousness. Each and every experience has a certain temporal extension, structure and articulation. We are here not simply dealing with a formal (but non-experiential) aspect of phenomenality, but with one of its fundamental constituents. An investigation of the temporal character of phenomenality obviously targets a quite different dimension of phenomenality than an investigation of some specific variable phenomenal content. For reflections on the relationship between temporality and for-me-ness, see Zahavi 1999, 2005, 2014.

experience however, but as a kind of constraint (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, this remains a mere metaphysical fact about consciousness, not a phenomenological fact.

The main problem with Prinz's argument by elimination is that it fails to exhaust the available options. A fourth option he fails to consider is the account of for-me-ness described above, where experiential for-me-ness is not a detachable self quale that one could introspect in isolation from any other content of consciousness, but rather an experiential feature of all phenomenal episodes that remains constant across them and constitutes the subjectivity of experience. To deny that such a feature is present in our experiential life, to deny the for-me-ness or mineness of experience, is to fail to recognize an essential constituent of experience. It is to ignore the subjectivity of experience. Thus Prinz's argument can precisely highlight a certain blindspot not uncommon among contemporary critics of the notion of for-me-ness. In fact, our notion of for-me-ness is compatible even with the kind of radical social constructivism defended by Wolfgang Prinz, according to whom the construction of subjectivity and selfhood "relies on, and is maintained by, various discourses on subjectivity" (Prinz 2003, 515). On this view, the 'me' of for-me-ness is a sociocultural construct rather than something naturally given. We independently find this view highly implausible and would hasten to reject it.<sup>3</sup> But remarkably, there is nothing about the claim that conscious states necessarily involve for-me-ness as a phenomenal constituent that requires one to reject it. The claim is about the nature of phenomenal consciousness but is completely silent on how that nature comes to be.<sup>4</sup> This demonstrates the theoretical flexibility of the experiential notion of for-me-ness.

Experiential for-me-ness is sometimes referred to as 'pre-reflective self-consciousness.' As Sartre writes at one point, "pre-reflective consciousness is self-consciousness. It is this same notion of self which must be studied, for it defines the very being of consciousness" (Sartre 2003: 100). The expression 'pre-reflective self-consciousness' is in some respects very apt, as it highlights the fact that for-me-ness requires no (and is prior to) any act of reflection. However, the term 'self-consciousness' has sometimes misled commentators to suppose that the notion is more demanding than it really is. For some, to be self-conscious is to think of oneself *as* oneself, or to be aware of one's states or features *as* one's own. Some take this to require that one be conscious of one's identity as the subject, bearer, or owner of different experiences. For others, it requires having a sense of 'who one is,' that is, having a sense of one's own particular character or personality. Clearly, on such understandings of the term 'self-consciousness,' it would be quite implausible to suggest that all phenomenal consciousness involves pre-reflective self-consciousness. It should be clear, however, that this is not how we understand the notion of an experiential for-me-ness. On our view, phenomenally conscious states involve for-me-ness, and to that extent pre-reflective self-consciousness, regardless and independently of whether any of these other capacities are possessed by their subject. An implication of this is obviously that the self-consciousness in question can be ascribed to all creatures that are phenomenally conscious, including various non-human animals. More generally, it is important to distinguish, on the one hand, having a for-me-

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, we think that Prinz (2003, 526) himself provides the *reductio ad absurdum* of the position when he claims that human beings who were denied all socially mediated attributions of self would be "completely self-less and thus without consciousness" and consequently be "unconscious zombies."

<sup>4</sup> In Bretano's (1982/1995) terms, it is a claim in descriptive psychology, not genetic psychology. It attempts to describe an aspect of conscious experience, but is silent about the correct causal explanation of it.

ness that embodies one's subjective first-person perspective, and on the other hand, having the capacity to conceptualize and articulate any of this in thought or language. Only the former is constitutive of experiential for-me-ness; the latter appears in sophisticated forms of self-consciousness but not in its minimal form.

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So much for the first introspectively based objection to experiential for-me-ness. Let us consider now the second objection: that the existence of experiential for-me-ness is disproved by the so-called transparency of experience. According to the thesis of the transparency of experience, whenever we try to introspectively attend to our conscious experience, we cannot help but become aware of what the experience presents in the world (Harman 1990; see also Shoemaker 1994 and Tye 1995 *inter alia*). In this sense, phenomenal consciousness does not present one with aspects or dimensions of one's own consciousness; rather, it is strictly world-presenting.

In keeping with our claim that for-me-ness is not a detachable item in the content of experience, we find that there is a cogent insight behind the transparency claim, at least for perceptual experience. The reason why an experience of a red apple differs from an experience of a yellow sunflower is indeed that the two experiences target two different objects with different properties. It is not clear that the same is true of mood and emotional experiences: being angry at  $x$  and being indignant about  $x$  do not quite seem to differ only in the properties they ascribe to  $x$ . More deeply, phenomenal consciousness does not only represent but also *presents* something (to someone). Compare a conscious perceptual experience of the color and shape of a yellow lemon and a subliminal or blindsighted representation of the same color and shape. Both represent the same distal features in the environment. But only the experience *presents* those features, in the sense of making *someone* phenomenally aware of them. To that extent, although all the presented items are worldly items, the presenting itself – presenting to someone – is an aspect of phenomenal consciousness as well. There is thus a minimal dimension of for-me-ness without which we cannot distinguish consciousness from unconscious representations of the same environmental features. This minimal for-me-ness is fully consistent with the contention that *once* a state of a subject presents something to the subject, it is necessarily some putative environmental feature that it presents (at least in perceptual experience). If we interpret the transparency claim as exhausted by this contention, we can appreciate that transparency is compatible with for-me-ness.

There are, of course, more ambitious interpretations of transparency, with which the notion of experiential for-me-ness is not and should not be compatible. Thus, the transparency claim is sometimes understood as the claim that, ultimately, the phenomenology of experiencing and the phenomenology of introspecting experience are strictly the same. As Dretske would have it, that of which one is aware in having a conscious experience is completely objective; it would be exactly the same even if one were not aware of it. In fact, everything “you are aware of would be the same if you were a zombie” (Dretske 2003, 1). As Dretske notes, his view gives rise to the following challenge: If I am only aware of the properties represented by my mental states, and not of the mental states themselves, how then can I at all know that I am phenomenally conscious? As he puts it, there is nothing of which I am aware that tells me that I am aware of it, and since everything I am aware of – namely, the world as I experience it – would be exactly the same if I were a zombie, I cannot know, at least not in any direct manner, that I am not

a zombie (Dretske 2003, 1). It might be suggested that we can know that we are having experiences by introspection, and hence that we are not zombies; but according to Dretske, introspection only tells us *what* we are aware of and not *that* we are aware (Dretske 2003, 8). We consequently have no direct access to the fact that we are conscious rather than non-conscious, and our conviction that we are is most likely based on a confusion (Dretske 2003, 9).

Dretske's outlook strikes us as indeed incompatible with the experiential notion of for-me-ness, but also as independently undesirable. In particular, the claim that the phenomenology of experiencing and the phenomenology of introspecting experience are strictly the same seems implausible. To all appearances, one can tell from the first-person perspective whether one is just having an experience of a yellow lemon or also introspecting that experience. There is thus a dimension of self-consciousness that lends itself to introspective or first-person appreciation after all. Our present point is that denying this minimal for-me-ness commits one to radically implausible claims, such as (i) that introspection cannot tell us *that* we are conscious and (ii) that there is no phenomenal difference between introspecting an experience and just having it.

It might be asked: How could one know *first-personally* that one is just having an experience, but not introspecting it? Isn't first-person knowledge precisely knowledge based on introspection? Our answer is that once one recognizes the existence of for-me-ness (hence, pre-reflective self-consciousness), it is clear that not all first-person knowledge is based on introspection. For not all first-person knowledge is based on *reflective* self-consciousness, which is what introspection is. Some such knowledge is based on *pre-reflective* self-consciousness – which is what for-me-ness is.

### 3. Objections from Psychopathology

Let us now consider two objections against SC from proponents of WC.<sup>5</sup> According to these objections, conscious states may occasionally be characterized by experiential for-me-ness, but this characteristic cannot be essential and necessary to them, since pathology presents us with exceptions: cases where experiences are 'anonymous' and exhibit an absence of for-me-ness or mineness.

Consider first schizophrenic thought insertion, where patients complain they have thoughts 'in them' that are not theirs, thoughts which seem to them 'inserted in them' by external forces or agents (see, e.g., Jaspers 1963, 124). Metzinger interprets this pathology as involving introspectively alienated conscious thoughts, for which patients have no sense of agency or ownership. He takes such cases to demonstrate that phenomenological mineness is not a necessary component of experience (Metzinger 2003, 334, 382, 445-6). However, we find that there are better interpretations of the clinical data.

In an influential paper, Campbell once made the following observation about schizophrenic thought insertion:

The thought inserted into the subject's mind is indeed in some sense his, just because it has been successfully inserted into his mind; it has some special relation to him. He has, for example, some especially direct knowledge of it. On the other hand, there is, the patient insists, a sense in which the thought is not his,

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<sup>5</sup> Recall that WC is the weaker for-me-ness claim, according to which the phenomenal character sometimes but not always involves for-me-ness as an experiential and not merely metaphysical constituent.

a sense in which the thought is someone else's, and not just in that someone else originated the thought and communicated it to the subject. ... (Campbell 1999, 610)

Following Campbell, and despite all manners of other disagreement, many have accepted the distinction between two forms of ownership: one linked to that fact that the experiences one lives through are given differently to one than to anybody else, and another that concerns whether or not one explicitly recognizes oneself as the agent or author of one's thoughts. Whereas thoughts can be disowned when it comes to the latter form of ownership (or authorship), most would agree that the first kind of ownership is not lost in thought insertion. When a thought-insertion patient reports that certain thoughts are not hers, that someone else is generating these thoughts, she is also indicating that these thoughts are present, not 'over there' in someone else's head, but within *her own* stream of consciousness, a stream of consciousness for which she claims ownership. Even if the inserted thoughts are felt as intrusive and foreign, they cannot lack minimal ownership altogether, since the afflicted subject is aware that it is she herself rather than somebody else who is experiencing them (Zahavi 1999, Billon & Kriegel forthcoming). Indeed, the only reason the patients *complain* is that they feel an experience *of theirs* to be inserted from without. As Gallagher remarks:

For that reason, the schizophrenic should provide a positive answer to what he might rightly regard as a nonsensical question: Are you sure that *you* are the one who is experiencing these thoughts? After all, this is precisely his complaint. *He* is experiencing thoughts that seem to be generated by others. (Gallagher 2000, 231)

In short, some sense of ownership is still retained, and that is the basis for the patient's complaint. This is also the view of Graham, who argues that subjects of thought insertion recognize that certain thoughts occur to them and that "the *subjectivity* sense" of ownership is consequently retained, but that their sense of self as agent, or the agency sense of ownership, is disrupted (Graham 2010, 247-8).

To deny that a patient suffering from thought insertion is completely bereft of a sense of ownership, or that such phenomena involve a complete effacement of for-me-ness, is not to deny that her overall sense of self is importantly different from ours. The clinician should recognize that such patients are subject to a kind of self-alienation or alienated self-consciousness. But as these very phrasings suggest, some dimension of self and self-consciousness is preserved even under those conditions – namely, for-me-ness proper. It is just that *something else* has changed. There are different views about what it is that *has* changed. According to Graham (2010), as we have just seen, what is missing in thought insertion patients is not for-me-ness, but a sense of agency – the patients feel there is something it is like *for them* to have the inserted thought, but they also feel as though it is not they who are doing the thinking. Other philosophers have suggested that the crucial experiential element missing in thought insertion patients is not the sense of agency, but the sense of *endorsing* the thought or being *committed* to it (Bortolotti 2010, Fernández 2010). But for the purposes of defending the experiential ubiquity of for-me-ness, one need not be committed to any specific account of what is missing in thought insertion patients; one only needs to insist on what is *not* missing, namely, for-me-ness. Indeed, our view is even consistent with there being *nothing* missing in the experience of thought insertion

patients. For the difference between thought-insertion patients and healthy subjects may pertain not to an element in the experience of the latter missing from that of the former, but on the contrary to a new, additional element in the experience of the former that is absent from the latter. For example, thought insertion patients may simply have a phenomenology of alienation from (some of) their own thoughts that healthy subjects do not experience.

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Consider next the claim that other forms of pathology can exemplify a dissociation between introspective access and felt ownership. Although patient DP was able to see everything normally, he did not immediately recognize that he himself was the perceiving subject. In order to become aware that it was he himself who was the perceiver, he had to undertake a subsequent inferential step (Lane 2012, 269). Lane argues that this patient's experience, prior to this inferential step, lacked any quality of mineness, so that it phenomenologically speaking was nobody's. More generally:

... the mental states of organisms can be conscious states, even if they are not taken as belonging to self. Phenomenal consciousness does not entail self-awareness; it is not stamped with a *meish* quality; and, for-me-ness does not play a determining role in its constitution. Appearances notwithstanding, the awareness of a mental state's existence is never more than conditionally related to the attribution of that state to a given subject. Matters only seem otherwise, because in all ordinary situations self and consciousness are tightly interwoven. (Lane 2012, 281)

We find Lane's conclusion unwarranted. Again, part of the problem is an overly robust construal of for-me-ness. Consider the following variety of overall conscious experiences: being absorbed in a movie; laboriously trying to decipher a menu written in a language you barely know; being suddenly hit in the face by a snowball; being humiliated by your peers; standing on the ten-meter diving board, trying to convince yourself to jump. In addition to the various items such experiences present, they also differ phenomenally with respect to the kind of self-consciousness they instantiate. When comparing such experiences, it should be evident that self-consciousness can vary quite a bit along a spectrum in its experiential acuity or intensity. The kind of experiential for-me-ness we have in mind is a sort of *minimum point* of self-consciousness. This minimal self-consciousness is present in DP's experience in the same way it is present in thought-insertion patients.

Lane actually allows that there is an utterly trivial sense in which the first-person perspective is retained even in pathological cases, but claims that this has no bearing on the issue of for-me-ness. Lane here refers to Blanke & Metzinger's (2009) claim that a weak first-person perspective merely amounts to a "purely geometrical feature" of our visuospatial presentation of reality. When we perceive objects, we see them as to the right or left, further away or closer by. This weak first-person perspective is simply the point of projection which functions as the geometrical origin of the 'seeing' organism's embodied perspective. We agree that this weak notion of a first-person perspective has nothing to do with subjectivity, mineness, and for-me-ness. In fact, we think it would be better to avoid using the term 'first-person perspective' as a label for this geometrical feature. But the experiential perspectival-ness that is retained even in the pathological cases goes beyond this geometrical feature. Even in the cases discussed, epistemic asymmetry still obtains: they are available in a special way to the subject in whom they occur. These experiences continue to be characterized by a subjective presence that makes them utterly unlike public

objects, which are accessible in the same way to a plurality of subjects. Regardless of how alienated the patient feels vis-à-vis the experience, the experience does not manifest itself entirely in the public domain. It continues to be phenomenally present to the patient in a way that is, in principle, unavailable to others. This is part of what its first-personal character amounts to, and why it remains correct to say that the pathological experience retains its for-me-ness.

#### 4. Explanatory Objections

There are two kinds of *explanatory* objection to the experiential notion of for-me-ness: from explanatory vacuity and from explanatory dispensability. The first is that there is nothing the experiential notion of for-me-ness explains, so there is no reason to posit it. The second is that whatever phenomena the notion explains, there are better explanations of these phenomena that do not cite experiential for-me-ness; the latter is to that extent dispensable.

Our response is threefold. We deny both the explanatory vacuity of experiential for-me-ness and its explanatory dispensability. But in addition, we also reject the idea that belief in the existence of experiential for-me-ness can be rational or warranted *only if* experiential for-me-ness can be shown to be explanatorily potent and indeed indispensable. To see why, consider that argumentation from explanatory vacuity and dispensability presupposes a description of that which needs to be explained. Before we can assess the explanatory potency of any posit, we must have a grasp of some phenomena in need of explanation. Presumably this means that *some* phenomena would have to be accepted as real independently of their own explanatory potency. In other words, *explanatory* dispensability can support rejection of a posit only when combined with *descriptive* dispensability. Given this, rejecting the existence of for-me-ness requires showing not only that citing for-me-ness is useless and/or unnecessary for *explaining* the phenomena, but also that it is useless and/or unnecessary for *describing* the phenomena. But in our opinion, it is impossible to correctly *describe* the structure of phenomenal consciousness without citing for-me-ness.<sup>6</sup>

Critics of experiential for-me-ness have nonetheless often treated for-me-ness as a theoretical posit in need of earning its explanatory keep. Schear (2009), for example, construes for-me-ness as a posit designed to explain a certain epistemic datum. Right now you are having an experience as of reading this article. Schear (2009, 100) isolates the following datum in need of explanation: “it is not exactly news to me that I am [having an experience as of] reading. When asked what I am doing [or experiencing], and then responding, I did not discover something.” The idea is that when we consider what experience we are having, there is never any sense of surprise regarding what the experience is; instead, there is a sense of familiarity. Consequently, when asked what experience we are having, we can respond immediately and effortlessly. Given this datum, one can offer an argument from inference to the best explanation for for-me-ness: the best

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<sup>6</sup> We say this fully aware that others may not feel that for-me-ness is descriptively indispensable. Our claim here is not that descriptive indispensability can be cited as an argument intended to convince skeptics for the existence of experiential for-me-ness. This is merely a defense of non-skeptics from the requirement that they be able to demonstrate explanatory indispensability in order to rationally maintain their belief in the existence of experiential for-me-ness.

explanation of the sense of familiarity with, and lack of surprise regarding, my concurrent experience is that I was aware of it all along, in that it is built into the very phenomenal character of the experience that it is like something *for me*. The problem with this argument, according to Schear, is double: (i) for-me-ness does not really explain the datum, and anyway, (ii) there are other, superior explanations available.

Start with (i). According to Schear, the explanatory force of for-me-ness is illusory. It is true that when one is asked what one is experiencing, one can respond immediately and effortlessly. However, one can respond immediately and effortlessly to many questions not concerned with experience. If asked whether the world is more than five minutes old, one can respond immediately and effortlessly. But it is implausible to suppose that one was consciously aware of the world's being older than five minutes all along (and supposing one was, would quickly lead to experiential explosion).

However, we find there is a crucial disanalogy between the fact that the world is older than five minutes and the fact that you have an experience as of reading. Even if you *just started* reading, it is “not news to you” that you have an experience as of reading. The sense of familiarity and lack of surprise follows immediately upon the onset of your experience. Moreover, the instant you have a new experience – say, of someone knocking on your office door – you will be in a position to report that you are having this new experience. It may be news to you that someone is knocking on the door, but it is no further news to you that you have an experience as of someone knocking on the door. This is not the case with non-experiential facts (facts about the external world): if you are not consciously aware of them when they come into existence, you will not be immediately in a position to report on them. The fact that the world has been older than five minutes has been around for a long time – long enough for you to acquire knowledge of it (indeed *familiarize* with it) that you now possess independently of any conscious awareness of this fact. But at the time a fact comes into being, the only way you can be in a position to report on it is if you are consciously aware of it. Therefore, the fact that as soon as a conscious experience comes into being you are in a position to report on it – if also endowed with the requisite conceptual skills – means that as soon as it comes into existence you are consciously aware of it. This would very much be explained by an account according to which it is in the very nature of the experience that it is like something *for you*. Thus experiential for-me-ness appears explanatorily useful (non-vacuous) after all.

Schear may yet retort that there are better – simpler and more elegant – explanations we could appeal to. This is (ii), the claim that experiential for-me-ness is explanatorily dispensable, even if not altogether explanatorily vacuous. Schear himself offers the following alternative explanation: because it is permanently true of us that we have the capacity for first-person thought, and this capacity is poised to be exercised throughout our waking life, we can immediately and effortlessly *become* aware of our conscious experiences and then report on them. Thus what is built into every conscious experience is only the *disposition* to become aware of it (in the right way), not any *occurrent* awareness of it. Every experience includes a *potential* for the experience to be for me, not *actual* for-me-ness. This capacity-based explanation, echoing Carruthers' (2000) so-called dispositional higher-order thought theory of consciousness, may be taken to be superior to the one we offer, in being simpler and more economical.

We concede that, somewhat trivially, there exist many possible explanations of the epistemic datum isolated by Schear. The real question is which is the best explanation.<sup>7</sup> The Schear-Carruthers dispositionalist explanation faces serious difficulties. For one thing, in citing the capacity for first-person thought, this explanation restricts itself to creatures who *have* this capacity, and it is widely recognized that some creatures are conscious despite lacking such a capacity.<sup>8</sup> More deeply, while the dispositionalist explanation proposes to account for the immediate and effortless capacity to respond to questions about one's experiences, it is not clear that it does anything to illuminate the sense of familiarity and lack of surprise underlying this capacity. This is important, because insofar as the original datum is itself construed dispositionally (the 'capacity to respond'), it is somewhat inviting to offer a dispositional explanation of it. Plausibly, however, dispositional phenomena always presuppose categorical bases, so in the vicinity of every dispositional explanandum there must also be a categorical explanandum that underlies it. In this case, the categorical explanandum with which we started is the occurrent sense of familiarity and lack of surprise with respect to what one is experiencing as the experience unfolds. It is natural to suppose that this occurrent sense is precisely the categorical basis of the capacity to answer questions immediately and effortlessly, so it is this more fundamental phenomenon that is most in need of explanation. Our own explanation is that this ever-present sense of familiarity and lack of surprise is grounded in the ubiquitous for-me-ness of experience, which itself is the categorical basis of one's capacity for first-person thought in the right kind of creatures. Thus whereas the Schear-Carruthers account focuses on a dispositional explanandum and offers a dispositional explanans for it, but without illuminating the more fundamental categorical phenomena underlying these, we identify the categorical explanandum that underlies the relevant dispositional explanandum and offer a categorical explanans that (we claim) underlies the relevant dispositional one. There is here an undeniable gain in explanatory depth, since in general the dispositional can be explained in terms of the categorical but not the other way round (the vase's fragility can be explained in terms of its being made of thin glass but its being made of thin glass cannot be explained in terms of its fragility).

In any case, in addition to the explanandum Schear isolates there are other explananda naturally explained by invoking experiential for-me-ness. Consider the phenomenon of first-person authority. When somebody says "my arm hurts," or "I thought you had forgotten our appointment," or "I plan to work at home tomorrow," it is customary to say that such statements are made with first-person authority. In making them, one is not necessarily infallible or incorrigible, but when others disbelieve one, it is generally because they think one is insincere rather than mistaken. On what is such first-person authority based? It is noteworthy that we only speak with first-person authority about our *conscious* mental states. We do not speak with such authority about our un- or non-conscious mental states, even though we might know about them through various indirect means (say, through conversations with a psychoanalyst or cognitive scientist). Of course, insofar as

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<sup>7</sup> For example, one could offer the occasionalist explanation according to which whenever we want to know what experience we have, God immediately intervenes and beams the relevant knowledge to us instantaneously. This would indeed explain the epistemic datum, but obviously there are superior explanations we should adopt rather than this one.

<sup>8</sup> Carruthers (2000) himself is happy to bite the bullet on this and deny non-human animals consciousness. This move is possible but should not be confused for a strength of the proposed explanation. It is not clear in print what Schear's attitude to this problem is.

we come to know about these states, they are to some extent something of which we become conscious, but that does not guarantee that they are *phenomenally* conscious. No, for us to be able to speak with first-person authority about a mental state, the mental state must be one we consciously live through. It is natural to claim that the notion of experiential for-me-ness (and pre-reflective self-consciousness) provides a ready answer to the question regarding the basis of first-person authority.

In our everyday life, we are absorbed by and preoccupied with projects and objects in the world, and as such do not *attend* to our experiential life. We tend to ignore it in favor of its objects. We can, of course, reflect on and attend to our experiences, we can make them the theme or object of our attention. But even prior to reflection, we are not quite ‘mindblind.’ Arguably, reflection aims to grasp what was there already prior to the grasping – it is *constrained* by what is pre-reflectively lived through. Thus experiential for-me-ness *determines* the sphere of what we may have first-person authority about.

There may be other potential explananda for experiential for-me-ness.<sup>9</sup> But what has already been said establishes that experiential for-me-ness is far from explanatorily vacuous, and may well be explanatorily indispensable with respect to certain phenomena. In addition, it is possible to maintain rational and warranted belief in the existence of experiential for-me-ness even in the absence of any explanatory profit in doing so, since for-me-ness may well be *descriptively* indispensable in the sense explained above.

## 5. Conclusion

We have considered introspective, psychopathological, and explanatory objections to the experiential notion of for-me-ness, the notion that conscious experiences have a for-me-ness or mine-ness or subjective givenness as an integral feature and constitutive aspect of their phenomenal character. In the process, a number of precisifications of our notion of

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<sup>9</sup> For example, one of the most intuitively fundamental facts about consciousness is sometimes said to be that conscious states are states we are aware of (Rosenthal 1990), or at least have aware-ly (Thomasson 2000). What explains the intuitiveness of this idea? It cannot be just the universality, since some universal truths about consciousness are not characterized by intuitiveness. Thus, all conscious states have a distinctive impact on short-term memory: this seems true, perhaps universally so, but does not seem to be intuitive. One straightforward explanation of the intuitiveness of the claim that all conscious states are states we are aware of is that every conscious state has a for-me-ness built into its very phenomenal character. Here too, other explanations are conceivable, of course. Rosenthal himself maintains that every conscious state is the target of a higher-order thought, though one that is ordinarily unconscious. However, it is not clear how the presence of an unconscious higher-order state can illuminate the intuitiveness of the idea that every conscious state is a state one is aware of. In general, the presence of unconscious states in us is not available to the folk in a way that makes for intuitiveness. Consider the sub-personal, unconscious visual representations in the dorsal stream of visual cortex, which allegedly control action on the go. Since such states are unconscious, the folk are unaware of their existence, so obviously it is not going to be intuitive that they exist. Even if cognitive science establishes beyond doubt that they do exist, this does not render their existence intuitive. By the same token, since Rosenthal’s higher-order thoughts are unconscious, the folk are unaware of their existence, so it cannot be intuitive that they exist. Nothing in a philosophical theory of consciousness can render it intuitive that conscious states are states we are aware of. But the notion that the very phenomenal character of conscious states includes as constituent a for-me-ness would explain the intuitiveness of all conscious states being states we are aware of. (Let us add that we disagree somewhat among ourselves on the question of whether we are intentionally “aware of” our occurrent experiences, or whether our basic familiarity with our ongoing experiential life has a more primitive and pre-intentional character; see Zahavi 1999 and 2005; Kriegel 2009, Ch.4.)

for-me-ness have emerged. They can be divided into three groups. The first concerns what for-me-ness *is*:

- For-me-ness is an invariant dimension of phenomenal character.
- For-me-ness distinguishes conscious experiences that present something to someone from non-conscious representations (e.g., blindsight) of the same objects.
- For-me-ness pertains in the first instance not to what is experienced but to how it is experienced.
- For-me-ness is what remains present in thought insertion pathologies.
- For-me-ness is a minimum point of self-consciousness.
- For-me-ness is the categorical basis of our capacity for first-person thought, which explains why we can usually (and if in possession of the requisite conceptual skills) report on our experiences immediately and effortlessly.

The second group of specifications pertains to what for-me-ness is *not*:

- For-me-ness is not a detachable self quale; it cannot occur on its own.
- For-me-ness does not necessarily involve a capacity to think of oneself *as* oneself, be aware of one's states *as* one's own, or any such cognitively demanding capacities.
- For-me-ness does not involve the kind of sense of ownership or authorship impaired in thought insertion pathologies.
- For-me-ness is not just a geometrical feature of perceptual experience.
- For-me-ness is not a merely dispositional feature of experience.

A third and related group pertains to what the experiential construal of for-me-ness is compatible with (which reveals what it is *not* committed to):

- The experiential construal of for-me-ness is compatible with the Humean claim that one cannot find one's self in experience.
- The experiential construal of for-me-ness is compatible with (independently dubious) social-constructivist approaches to the self.
- The experiential construal of for-me-ness is compatible with modest transparency claims that phenomenal differences between perceptual experiences pertain to what these are experiences of.
- The existence of for-me-ness is compatible with its explanatory dispensability.

If nothing else, these clarifications exhibit the theoretical flexibility of the experiential notion of for-me-ness.

We do not expect, of course, that these clarifications will remove all discomfort with the experiential notion of for-me-ness. Many philosophers will still feel that there is something elusive and slightly mysterious about for-me-ness. In fact, we do not wish to deny this: we think that for-me-ness is just as mysterious as phenomenal consciousness! Some approaches to phenomenal consciousness make it utterly mysterious why phenomenal consciousness is consistently felt to be *problematic* – why we have a *problem of consciousness* on our hands. Like others (e.g., Levine 2001, Strawson 2011), we think that for-me-ness (or mineness, or subjective givenness) is the *most fundamental fact* about

phenomenal consciousness, is indeed what makes it challenging in the first place. It would be nice to ultimately demystify phenomenal consciousness. But a first step is to identify correctly the source of the mystery. Our contention is that that source – the most fundamental, most general, most elemental dimension of phenomenal consciousness – is for-me-ness.

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