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Shaun Gallagher

*"Intentionality and pre-reflective consciousness; Bodily affect and
phenomenal consciousness"*

(Report by Mana Fujiwara & Eva Poland)

Intentionality and pre-reflective consciousness

Shaun Gallagher

The outline of Shaun Gallagher's very poignant and insightful lecture included an introduction to phenomenology, the concepts of intentionality and pre-reflective self-awareness, as well as the temporal structure of consciousness, which we attempt to briefly summarize here.

1. Phenomenology

Phenomenology, the philosophical approach to the study of consciousness phenomena, can be defined as the attempt to identify the invariant characteristics and structures of consciousness. Conceptually there are three important aspects to be noted:

- Phenomenality, the notion that there is something it is like to be conscious
- Intentionality, the notion that to be conscious is to be conscious of something
- Self-structure, the notion that consciousness always involves some form of self

To situate phenomenology in a historical context one can contrast it with the perspective of naturalism, the idea that a complete explanation of consciousness can be reduced to biology, psychology and ultimately physics as in positivistic or scientific views predominant in the 19th century. Examples for the contemporary continuation of this line of thought would be Crick and Metzinger, who equate the self to a mere assembly of neurons or a model of self respectively. Despite naturally taking an anti-scientific stance, phenomenology can by no means be thought of as inherently anti-scientific and there have in fact been many attempts to integrate the philosophy of the mind with cognitive sciences. Notable approaches to 'naturalize phenomenology' in this sense include Varela's neurophenomenology as well as earlier work by Merleau-Ponty and Gurwitsch seeking a synthesis between phenomenology and psychology or neuroscience, which has been referred to as triangulation.

2. Intentionality

Intentionality, the about-ness of consciousness as described by Husserl and Brentano, involves a noetic aspect such as perceiving, remembering, imagining, desiring, believing, loving or hating something, and an intentional object which is the noematic aspect. Broadly

there are two main interpretations of Husserl's concept of noema (Greek: that which is thought), informally known as the West Coast and East Coast interpretation. The former, including most notably Follesdal and other interpreters such as Dreyfus, McIntyre and Smith, considers Husserl's noema a propositional meaning acting as intermediary between subject and object whereas the latter group, including Gurwitsch, Sokolowski, Hart and Drummond, rejects this referential perspective and claims it is a mistake to reduce the physical object to a mental representation.

3. Reflective and pre-reflective awareness

Examining intentionality and the role of the self in more detail, Shaun Gallagher introduced the concept of pre-reflective self-awareness by posing three questions to the audience: You are sitting there. Did I have to tell you that or did you already have some sense of it? After I told you, did you have to check in order to confirm I was right? How is it possible that you were able to understand my statement, or this question?

The immediate intuitive access to oneself demonstrated in this example constitutes a rudimentary form of self-awareness including proprioception and episodic memory that is present prior to any reflection upon our experience. It can thus be considered an implicit primary awareness rather than an explicit higher-order form of self-consciousness. Pre-reflective self-awareness, which may be ascribed to all conscious entities, accounts for the quality of mine-ness or ownership given in conscious experiences. Viewpoints sceptical of the concept of pre-reflective self-awareness argue however that this form of awareness can be absent when we are fully immersed in a project or action. Further the investigation of self-awareness faces a fundamental measurement problem insofar as the requirement of a report of one's experience would result in a reflection upon one's experience.

4. The temporal structure of consciousness

When listening to music we experience a melody rather than a sequence of isolated tones - phenomenological consciousness must therefore be able to account for temporal dynamics. Husserl's phenomenology of time consciousness distinguishes three elements, the primal impression itself, retention, which includes or preserves the characteristics of past impressions, and protention, which can be thought of as a prediction of the next impression. As part of his analysis of time consciousness Husserl further distinguishes transversal intentionality, which refers to the unity of an intended object, and longitudinal intentionality, which refers to the unity of consciousness across temporal dynamics. Neurophenomenologists such as Varela and Thompson have identified three time scales relevant for consciousness in differing ways: The elementary scale of around 10-100 ms corresponding to neuronal events such as for example the time needed to transmit visual input from the retina to the visual cortex, the integration phase of 0.5 to 3 s corresponding to

the phase-locking of neural assemblies and synchronization between distant brain areas, and the narrative scale for example corresponding to episodic memory which would include long-term dynamics.

5. The minimal self

The minimal self as we think of it here is defined as the sense of self that we get from pre-reflective self-awareness, and has three components, which are first-person perspective, sense of ownership and sense of agency. Wittgenstein distinguished first-person perspective as-subject from first-person perspective as-object. Also Shoemaker suggested immunity to error through misidentification (IME, bodily IME). Wittgenstein distinguished first-person pronoun as subject, which is for experiences that the subject can never be unsure who is experiencing it, from as object, looking in the mirror and the subject can wonder who is experiencing. In Shaun's analysis, he pointed out the case where the identification judgement is mistaken. Even when the subject was looking at Wittgenstein's mirror, looking at sunburned rubber hand for instance, the subject can misidentify himself but the subject is actually experiencing. So, the subject correctly identifies himself-as-subject, but misidentified as the person who's got sunburn (subject-as-object). This part was ended up with giving the audience open questions; if there is any pathology or experiment that preserves consciousness but destroys pre-reflective self-awareness, and if so, if it would challenge IME.