

Chapter 13

The Inside-Outside Story of Consciousness: A Phenomenological Exploration

Nilanjana Sanyal

Human being is the most precious living creature in this planet, the concern for whose well-being is the tune of the era. The lack of consciousness regarding self-contents as well as contents of realization beyond the existential concrete experiences is preventing us from enjoying the paths of deeper understanding of life and hence creating “existential crisis” for us. Modern science speaks to us of an extraordinary range of interrelations. Biologists are beginning to uncover the fantastic and complex dance of genes that creates personality and identity, a dance that stretches far into the past and shows that each so-called identity is composed of a swirl of different influences. Physicists have introduced us to the world of quantum particles. Neuropsychology is trying to open up the treasure of mirror neurons in explaining our mental orientations. Psychologists are trying multidimensionally to explain behaviour in its conscious and not that conscious spheres. Phenomenology seems to be a reasoned inquiry which discovers the inherent essences of apparent experiences. It seeks through systematic reflection to determine the essential properties and structures of consciousness and conscious experience. At this juncture, my discussion is going to cover the inside-outside story of consciousness from a phenomenological angle of interpretation.

The world’s physical aspect, that is, what it is like to be something, eludes us completely and always be like that because the confusion reigns in what it means to know and to be a “self” that knows. Scientists speak of sensorial experiences. But they seem to be frustrated over the fact of not being able to decipher what experience is. They seem to be oblivious to the fact that they do not know what it is to be “physical”. Experience seems to be physical, but the knowledge of experiences seems to be intangibly psychological. The query is where lies the link between

N. Sanyal (✉)

Department of Psychology, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India

e-mail: sanyal_nilanjana2004@rediffmail.com

these two dimensions of conscious experience and what are the basic components of the experience—the self or anything else? The idea of inside-outside story of consciousness begets here. To unfold the story, at the outset, the self seems to be a mystery with its implicit and explicit components that needs clear revelation in psychological perspective. At its core, “self” is not the organism, and it is not physical. It seems to be an intangible emergent property of information processing. It mediates the response of the organism to stimulation from the organism’s environment and thus represents itself as the agent of the organism. Anyway, being the experiencing agent, its structural and functional components are expected to offer wide vistas of understanding in the areas of philosophy as well as psychology.

Primarily the self is the experiencer, and the self experiences that entails is the concept of “existence”.

13.1 Social Forms of Self-Consciousness

Psychology, the scientific form of openness into existence and beyond existence experiential processes, is trying to strike the right chord of the mind—the concept of “consciousness” of the “self” to engrave the real pitch of subjective individuality amidst so many objectivities to link “thy” self with “thine”. This is to have full enrichment of emotionality to guide cognition and conation in right direction to enjoy the flow of life to its brim and escape wraths of sufferance. Hence the need to probe into the processes of consciousness and to draw their implications in life.

Phenomenology, being a specific conceptual wing of psychology, introduces “semiotic” dimension in analysis of “consciousness”. Unlike cognitive, neurobiological or so to say behaviouristic modes, phenomenology holds the view that mind is the goal of body. The existence of one’s body is fact; the feeling that one’s body is just the vessel for the mental processes or rather, the experiences is the truth.

The experiences belong to the realm of “consciousness”—the experiencer being the self. A focus on embodied self-experience inevitably leads to a decisive widening of the discussion. The “externality” of embodiment puts one, his actions, in the public sphere. Self-consciousness involves not only an ability to make reflective judgements about our own beliefs and desires but also includes a sense of embodied agency. This embodiment brings intersubjectivity and sociality into the picture, draws attention to the question of how certain forms of self-consciousness are intersubjectively mediated and may depend on one’s social relations to others (Ricoeur 1950). This kind of self-consciousness is also the occasion for a self-alienation. “My experience of the other is at the same time an experience that involves my own self-consciousness, a self-consciousness in which I am pre-reflectively aware that I am an object for another. This experience can further motivate a reflective, self-consciousness, as I consider how I must appear to the other” (Ricoeur 1950, p. 282).

The concept has been represented in the following schematic diagram (Fig. 13.1):

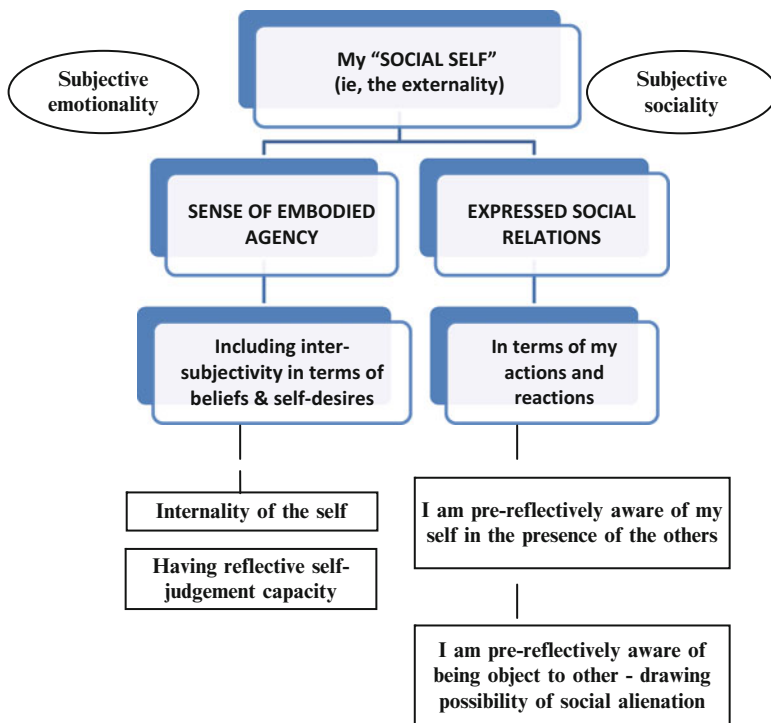


Fig. 13.1 The ingredients of functional self

13.2 Functional Folds in Variations of Consciousness

To draw the implications of consciousness in our wider spectrum of life, the existence and character components of consciousness need little more elaboration. Such elaborations are expected to reveal the basic “feel” of consciousness, once again in phenomenological parlance of conception and analysis. Within the folds of experience, different varieties of consciousness can be conceived:

Awakeness—This is an ability to process information about the world and deal with it in a rational fashion. This is having a focal point in consciousness and being aware of it cognitively.

Introspection—This access to one’s mental states is an important component of the everyday concept of consciousness. This is the process by which we can become aware of the contents of our internal states. For example, our dreams with their contents or where we can consciously locate a source of emotional distress that was vague earlier.

Reportability—This is our ability to report the contents of our mental states. It presupposes the ability to introspect but is more constrained than that ability, as it presupposes a capacity for language.

Self-consciousness—This refers to our ability to think about ourselves and our awareness of our existence as individuals and of our distinctness from others.

Attention—We are conscious of something when we pay our attention to it, that is, when a significant portion of cognitive resource is devoted to dealing with the relevant information. There is a central point and peripheral point in our attention process. Contents of central points generate clear consciousness.

Voluntary control—A behavioural act is conscious, when that act is performed deliberately, that is, where the action is caused in the appropriate way by an element of prior thought.

Knowledge—Someone is conscious of a fact precisely when they know the fact.

13.3 The Inside-Outside Aspect of Consciousness

Although these concepts have a psychological core, i.e. having logicity as well as self-drawn feeling tones, they are associated with phenomenal states also. To have a glimpse of this phenomenal angle to consciousness, the character aspect of consciousness is elaborated in the following fashion. In Sartre's (1971) opinion consciousness is present to itself; it is self-predatory. Consciousness is "itself" transcendent, to the extent then that it has an "itself"; consciousness as reflectively known "remains in the same place, indefinitely absorbed, devoured and yet indefinitely intact, wholly digested and yet wholly outside, as indigestible as stone... the "digested indigestible"..." (p. 739). Consciousness is thus the "identity of appearance and existence" (Sartre, p. 17). It is pure "appearance" in the sense that it exists only to the degree to which it appears. To whatever extent it appears, it appears exactly *as it is*. It cannot appear in alternative ways.

In the transcendence, Sartre (1972) attempts to reconcile the utter transparency of consciousness with its presence to reflection by positioning the two, respectively, in the arms of an ostensible distinction between the "inside" and the "outside" of consciousness. Granted that "an absolute interiority never has an outside" (p. 84), the psychic, "the transcendent object of reflective consciousness" (p. 71), is its outside. Consciousness could not be intrinsically "empty" and transparent. There is expected the layer of apperceptive mass: the genetic root of consciousness. So, the outside has invaded inside. Reflection, though it retrieves the surface glare, would nonetheless be incapable of apprehending consciousness "itself". To see consciousness (itself) is to see through it. Reflective consciousness effaces "itself" in the face of pre-reflective consciousness of the world. Only one "face", one manifestation, remains for both. The (ostensibly) "two" cannot be distinguished. The transparent is not an intuitive presence but rather the condition for the phenomenal capacity of being-in-itself.

But whatever may be the experience and character part of consciousness, to fathom the depth of consciousness and draw the same energy for further advancements in life, there needs to be an "experiencer", the firsthand, first-personal experiencer, the "self". To unfold the functional impact of consciousness, its relation to its agent, the self and the selfhood, needs to be established.

13.4 Self: The Conscious Experiencer

Self is an entity marked by reflexive consciousness, interpersonal rates and reputation and executive function. Without these bindings the concept of self becomes meaningless. Self begins when awareness turns around in a circle and offers some realization or absorption of meaning from life context itself. In its characteristic folds:

- Reflexive consciousness gives awareness to the self (our actions).
- Interpersonal strings add meaning in “self’s life in extensive social contacts (feeling aspects in life).
- The executive platter serves self as an entity that makes choices and decisions, which finally initiates action and takes responsibility (the intellectuality or cognitive aspect of subjective self).

These features together orient the self towards consciousness regarding external and specially regarding internal reality. The relatedness of self to consciousness seems to be the most important infrastructure of the individual self to initiate the process of improving the “stay quality” in the world being enriched in internal realization capability. Focusing our experiencing gaze on our own physical life necessarily takes place as “*reflection*”, as a turning about a glance which has previously been directed elsewhere. Every experience can be subject to such reflection, as can indeed every manner in which we occupy ourselves with any real or ideal object, for instance, thinking, in the modes of feeling and will, valuing and striving. The phenomenological reversal of our gaze shows that this “being directed” is really an immanent essential feature of the respective experiences involved—they are “intentional” experiences. Consciousness of something is not an empty holding of something; every phenomenon has its own total form of intention. In fact, the idea of a phenomenological psychology encompasses the whole range of tasks arising out of the experience of self and the experience of the other founded on it.

13.5 Experience Happens to the “Experiencer”: Consciousness Involves a Self-Appearance

On the phenomenological view, a minimal form of self-consciousness is a constant structural feature of conscious experience. Experience happens for the experiencing subject in an immediate way, and as part of this immediacy, it is implicitly marked as “my experience”. For the phenomenologists, this immediate and first-personal givenness of experiential phenomena must be accounted for in terms of a pre-reflective self-consciousness. The notion of pre-reflective self-awareness is related to the idea that experiences have a subjective “feel” to them, a certain phenomenal quality of “what it is like” or what it “feels” like to have them. In the most basic sense of the term, self-consciousness is not something that comes about the moment one

attentively inspects or reflectively introspects one's experiences; rather the process seems to have its embeddedness in pre-reflective consciousness.

The reflective self-consciousness is a higher-order cognition. Pre-reflective self-awareness is an ongoing and more primary self-consciousness. Consciousness always involves a self-appearance. Experience is always self-manifesting. Pre-reflective self-consciousness is not simply a quality added to the experience, an accessory; rather, it constitutes the very mode of being of the experience.

Reflective self-consciousness is an explicit, conceptual and objectifying awareness that takes a lower-order consciousness as its attentional theme. In phenomenology, it is called inner perception as contrasted with outer. The self is there before all reflection. Reflection is only a mode of self-apprehension, but not the mode of primary self-disclosure (Heidegger 1989, p. 226). One advantage of the phenomenological view is that it is capable of accounting for psychological self-identity, that is, the experience of self-identity through time, without actually having to project the self as a separate entity over and above the stream of consciousness. Pre-reflective self-awareness is thus distinctly different from explicit self-consciousness.

Pre-reflective contents are hints, cues of understandings, insights into—but not—the real thing. It is a “feel” rather than cognition or knowledge. The moment self becomes aware of it, it earns the quality of reflection—because it is reflected to me.

In pre-reflective self-awareness, one is not confronted with a thematic or explicit awareness of the experience as belonging to oneself. Rather the dealing is with a nonobservational, nonobjectifying self-acquaintance. Basically, the notion of pre-reflective self-awareness is related to the idea that experiences have a subjective “feel” to them, a certain (phenomenal) quality of “what it is like” or what it “feels” like to have them. It is a case for perceptual experiences, experiences of desiring, feeling and thinking. All the experiences are characterized by a feeling of “mineness”. As James (1890) put it, all experience is “personal”. This first-person “givenness” entails an implicit experiential self-reference.

13.6 Self-Consciousness in Its Internality and Externality

Within the perspective of pre-reflective self-consciousness, evidences from developmental psychology and ecological psychology suggest that there is a primitive, proprioceptive form of self-consciousness already in place from birth. This primitive self-awareness precedes the mastery of language and the ability to form conceptually informed judgements, and it may serve as a basis for more advanced types of self-consciousness (Neisser 1988). Selfhood emerges within infant-adult interaction (Butterworth 1995, 1999). Selfhood is thus a process that emerges from social interaction and is sustained by cultural signifiers and practices. But the process itself exists prior to culture. Semiosis is a fundamental aspect of the way the living world works. In fact human selfhood depends on the human form of consciousness being conditioned by the symbols that are assimilated from the cultural milieu. However,

consciousness qua awareness existed prior to the appearance of this milieu and arose along with the evolution of all living beings. And since the key to human selfhood is the capacity to use symbols, answers are framed in the language of semiotics. General theories of signs are thus called semiotics. In brief, “the self” is a semiotic process. In its functional dimension the interpreter encounters the sign, and the object is produced. This process involves components both inside and outside the individual. The internalization of this process is assumed to create the human sense of self. What is internalized initially derives from the actions and gestures of human social interaction. At later stages in the development of the individual, cultural symbols such as speech and writing also become important.

The notion of self-consciousness has been the subject of a rich and complex analysis in the phenomenological tradition. The recognition of the existence of a primitive form of pre-reflective self-consciousness is an important starting point for an understanding of more elaborate forms of self-consciousness that are concept and language dependent. Phenomenological analyses show these processes to be more than purely mental or cognitive events since they integrally involve embodiment and intersubjective dimensions.

13.7 Temporality in Self-Consciousness

According to Husserl’s analysis, pre-reflective experience of any sort (perception, memory, imagination etc.) has a common *temporal structure* such that any moment of experience contains a retentive reference to past moments of experience, a current openness (primal impression) to what is present and an anticipation of the moments of experience that are just about to happen (Gallagher 1997). The retentive structure of experience does not simply disappear at the next moment but is kept in an intentional currency and constitutes a coherency that stretches over an experienced temporal duration. Reflective self-consciousness, which takes pre-reflective experience as its object, is itself (like any conscious experience) characterized by the same temporal structure. As a reflecting subject, “I” never fully coincide with myself. When I reflect, there is always something about my experience which will evade my reflective grasp: the very moment itself.

13.8 Bodily Self-Awareness

Pre-reflective self-awareness is both embodied and embedded in the world (Husserl 1973, p. 57). The body provides not only the egocentric *spatial framework* for orientation towards the world but also the constitutive contribution of its mobility. Perception does not involve a passive reception, but an active exploration of the environment. The implicit self-awareness of the actual and possible movements of one’s body helps shape the experience that one has of the world. In fact, bodily

self-awareness is not an awareness of the body in isolation from the world; it is embedded in action and perception. The body is revealed to us in our experience of the world in self-consciousness.

A developmental analysis reveals many links between the conceptual self and its preconceptual underpinnings. A symbolic form of self permits a conception of self as unique and supports reflective self-awareness and a private perspective. It is the primacy of the ecological aspect of self which makes the mental experience of self, to the introspective adult so real.

13.9 Self-Consciousness and Phenomenology

Phenomenology in Husserl's (1952) conception is primarily concerned with systematic reflection on and analysis of the structure of consciousness and the phenomena that appear in acts of consciousness. In its most basic form, phenomenology attempts to create conditions for the objective study of topics usually regarded as subjective, consciousness and the content of conscious experiences such as judgments, perceptions and emotions. Although phenomenology seeks to be scientific, it does not attempt to study consciousness from the perspective of clinical psychology or neurology. Instead, it seeks through systematic reflection to determine the essential properties and structures of consciousness and conscious experience. An important element of phenomenology is "intentionality" or "aboutness", the notion that consciousness is always consciousness of something. The object of consciousness is called the intentional object which is constituted of perception, memory, retention and protention, signification etc. which are called intentionalities for consciousness. Consciousness is directed at the same intentional object in direct perception as it is immediately following retention of this object and the eventual remembering of it.

Intentionality represents an alternative to the representational theory of consciousness, which holds that reality cannot represent an alternative to the representational theory of consciousness, which holds that reality cannot be grasped directly because it is available only through perceptions of reality that are representations of it in the mind. Husserl (1952) countered that consciousness is not "in" the mind but rather conscious of something other than itself (the intentional object), whether the object is a substance or a figment of imagination. Hence the phenomenological method relies on the description of phenomenon as they are given to consciousness in their immediacy.

13.10 Phenomenology in Historical Matrix

Phenomenology has at least three main meanings in philosophical history.

For Hegel (1920–1960), phenomenology is an approach to philosophy that begins with an exploration of phenomena that presents itself to us in conscious

experience, as a means to finally grasp the absolute, logical, ontological and metaphysical spirit that is behind phenomena. This has been called “dialectical phenomenology”.

For Husserl (1952), phenomenology is the reflective study of the *essence* of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. Phenomenology takes the intuitive experience of phenomena as its starting point and tries to extract from it the essential features of experiences and the essence of what we experience. This has been called transcendental phenomenology.

Heidegger (1986) believed that Husserl’s approach overlooked basic structural features of both the subject and object of experience (what he called their “being”) and expanded phenomenological inquiry to encompass our understanding and experience of Being itself, thus making phenomenology the *method* of the study of being, *ontology of self*.

In Heidegger’s view, then, human being (Dasein) involves what might be called an implicitly sensed “ground,” “horizon” or “clearing” which is the context or totality within which experience occurs. This horizon is in a sense the most important aspect of human existence, for it is the very condition or possibility of anything at all appearing or being known. Moreover, it is the only place where the being of either “man” or “world” is disclosed.

A list of thinkers used the term phenomenology in a variety of ways¹:

F.C. Chetinger (1702–1782)—The study of the divine system of relations.

D. Hue (1711–1776)—A treatise of human nature.

J.H. Lambert (1728–1777)—Theory of appearance underlying empirical knowledge.

I. Kant (1724–1804)—Objects as phenomena are shaped and grasped by human sensibility and understanding.

G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831)—Knowing phenomena more fully, we can gradually arrive at a consciousness of the absolute and spiritual truth of Divinity.

C. Stumpf (1848–1936)—Used phenomenology to refer to an ontology of sensory contents.

E. Husserl (1859–1938)—Established phenomenology at first as a kind of “descriptive psychology” and later as a transcendental and eidetic science of consciousness.

M. Heidegger (1889–1976)—Attempted to develop a theory of ontology that led him to his original theory of *Dasein*, the non-dualistic human being.

One advantage of the phenomenological view is that it is capable of accommodating for psychological self-identity, that is, the experience of self-identity through time, without actually having to posit the self as a separate entity over and above the stream of consciousness. Although we live through a number of different experiences, the experiencing itself remains a constant in regard to whose experience it is. Only a being with this sense of ownership could go on to form

¹See www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenomenology

concepts about herself, consider her own aims, ideals and aspirations as her own, construct stories about herself and plan and execute actions for which she will take responsibility. Self-consciousness is to be understood as an intrinsic feature of the primary experience. Phenomenologists typically argue that the feature that makes a mental state conscious is located within the state itself; it is an intrinsic property of those mental states that have it. Hence, if pre-reflective contents are assumed to be the inside story of self-consciousness, the reflective contents cover the outside façade of self-consciousness. In the context, in contrast to pre-reflective self-consciousness which delivers an implicit sense of self at an experiential or phenomenal level, reflective self-consciousness is an explicit, conceptual and objectifying awareness that takes a lower-order consciousness as its attentional theme. In an overall stance, the notion of self-consciousness has been the subject of a rich and complex analysis in the phenomenological tradition. By ignoring that tradition, contemporary systematic work on the issue may miss out on important insights that in the best of circumstances end up being rediscovered decades or centuries later. The recognition of the existence of a primitive form of pre-reflective self-consciousness is an important starting point for an understanding of more elaborate forms of self-consciousness that are concept and language dependent. Phenomenological analyses show these processes to be more than purely mental or cognitive events since they integrally involve embodiment and intersubjective dimensions.

13.11 Conclusion

Knowing the inside-outside facades of consciousness of self from phenomenological aspect, a state has arrived to draw its implication in higher planes of consciousness in the realm of transcendence. Hoffmeyer (1996) is felt to be quoted here as “This world has always meant something. It just did not know it. Now with the evolution of self-awareness, it knows or rather we know it”. Here lies the context of Dasein, the “being” in the highest level of ontology.

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