

Athens Institute for Education and Research

ATINER



ATINER's Conference Paper Series

PHI2012-0188

**Expression and Authority.
Reflections on the First Person
Perspective in Wittgenstein,
Zahavi and Moran**

**Ilaria Resto
PhD Student
University of Pavia
Italy**

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209
Email: info@atiner.gr URL: www.atiner.gr
URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

Printed in Athens, Greece by the Athens Institute for Education and Research.
All rights reserved. Reproduction is allowed for non-commercial purposes if the
source is fully acknowledged.

ISSN 2241-2891

13/09/2012

An Introduction to ATINER's Conference Paper Series

ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. The papers published in the series have not been refereed and are published as they were submitted by the author. The series serves two purposes. First, we want to disseminate the information as fast as possible. Second, by doing so, the authors can receive comments useful to revise their papers before they are considered for publication in one of ATINER's books, following our standard procedures of a blind review.

Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

This paper should be cited as follows:

Resto, I. (2012) "Expression and Authority. Reflections on the First Person Perspective in Wittgenstein, Zahavi and Moran" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: PHI2012-0188.

Expression and Authority. Reflections on the First Person Perspective in Wittgenstein, Zahavi and Moran

Ilaria Resto
PhD Student
University of Pavia
Italy

Abstract

Wittgenstein's thought about subjectivity has been widely interpreted as the origin of the contemporary tendency of considering the mind from an abstract point of view, avoiding the importance of the first-personal dimension. By contrast with a deflationarist line of interpretation, I argue that it can be read in a fruitful comparison with the philosophy of mind of anti-reductionist inspiration, focusing not so much on the private language argument as on the positive idea of inwardness developed in the last phase of his work.

First of all, I focus on some fundamental aspects of the semantics and the epistemology of the first person authority, starting from Wittgenstein's observations on the first personal uses of language, namely on avowals.

In particular, I consider the aspect called by Soemaker *immunity from error through misidentification* relative to phenomenal avowals and the aspect called by Evans *transparency* relative to intentional avowals.

Secondly, I consider the question: what is the relation between this semantic and epistemological analysis and the contemporary theories of First Person Perspective?

The first theory I consider is Zahavi's theory of *pre-reflective self-awareness* as a non-thematic and non objectifying form of Consciousness, contrasting the higher-order theories of consciousness.

The second theory is Moran's theory of first person authority as constitutively practical and deliberative.

In conclusion, I argue that the semantic and epistemological analysis of the First Person authority started by Wittgenstein influences in a positive way and can converge with some relevant aspects of Zahavi's and Moran's critics of the higher-level theories of consciousness.

Contact Information of Corresponding author:

1. A semantic and epistemological analysis of the First Person Authority

1.1. The Authority of Avowals and the Immunity from Error through Misidentification

Wittgenstein's thought about subjectivity has been widely considered, both by the continental and the analytical tradition as the origin of the contemporary tendency of considering the mind from an abstract and third-personal point of view, avoiding the importance of the experiential dimension.

Wittgenstein's insights on subjectivity have been too deeply influenced by an univocal line of interpretation, that of deflationarism.

On the contrary, I argue that they can be read in a positive and not deflationary way, focusing not so much on the negative part of the private language argument as on the idea of inwardness developed in the last phase of his work, from the *Philosophical Investigations* to the volumes on the *Philosophy of Psychology*.

Stressing the irreducibility of the mind to a self-enclosed realm of private objects internally detectable by a certain level of 'self-distance', his notion of *expression* plays a crucial role in outlining a positive account of the mind.

Wittgenstein overturns the traditional perspective from the inward observation to that of the intersubjective context of the origin and the learning of human language: instead of focusing on how words refer to sensations, he poses the question: "how do a human being learn sensation words?"

Sensation words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new 'pain behavior' (1953, § 244).

Psychological terms are *avowals*, namely instinctive and spontaneous expressions of the subjective life, whose function is similar to the use of the most fundamental preverbal signals and gestures. So, mental terms are learned extensions and substitutes of the natural manifestations of the mental, like gestures, smiles, cries and grimaces. Then, their function is originally and primarily expressive, not descriptive, nor cognitive.

Avowals such as 'I feel pain' or 'I am happy' or 'I am thinking about my thesis', as normally made, have a seemingly unique status, enjoy a special security. Unlike typical apriori judgements, *avowals* concern contingent matters of fact. Yet their production does not seem to involve consulting any evidence, inference or ordinary observation. Like perceptual reports, they are seemingly 'effortless' and are strongly presumed to be true, but, unlike such reports, they are not based on ordinary perception. Rather, they appear to be made on no evidential basis at all. And in contrast to all other pronouncements, avowals are strongly resistant to epistemic criticism, not subjected to ordinary doubts and corrections and invulnerable to brute errors.

In order to deepen the distinctive security of *avowals*, I quote Wittgenstein's distinction between *subjective* and *objective* uses of *I* introduced in the *Blue Book*:

There are two different cases in the use of the word 'I' (or 'my') which I might call 'the use as object' and 'the use as subject'. Examples of the first kind of use are these: 'My arm is broken', 'I have grown six inches', 'I have a bump on my forehead', 'The wind blows my hair out'. Examples of the second kind are: 'I see so and so', 'I try to lift my arm', 'I think it will rain', 'I have a toothache'. (1958, p. 66)

While the *objective* uses of *I* imply a kind of self-reference similar to the way even others can refer to one, involving a detective observation and a recognition of one's own body (so they allow the possibility of error), the uses of *I* as *subject* avoid the possibility of error:

There is no question of recognizing a person when I say I have toothache. To ask 'are you sure it's you who have pains?' would be nonsensical. (1958, p. 67)

Following Wittgenstein, it is possible to say that the errors that seem to be avoided when using 'I' as subject are errors of "recognition", even if it is not clear in what sense this referential infallibility of the first person pronoun is to be conceived.

In his opposition to Cartesianism¹, he is strongly reluctant to characterize the asymmetry between the first and the third personal authority in epistemological terms (1953, 222) and ultimately the question if in his conception 'I' is a genuine referential expression has been subjected to different interpretations. Among these, the most influential one has been Anscombe's deflationarist interpretation (similar to Lichtenberg's refutation of *cogito*). In her famous article *The First Person*, she maintains a 'no-referential' theory of 'I' according to which to preserve the epistemic asymmetry of the uses of 'I' is possible only rejecting its semantic continuity, denying that it constitutes a genuine referential expression.

By contrast with this deflationarist line of interpretation, Shoemaker takes Wittgenstein's observations on the subjective uses 'I' to be drawing attention to a certain phenomenon he dubs '*immunity from error through misidentification*' (1968, p. 556-7). The statement 'I feel pain' or 'I see a canary' is not subjected to error through misidentification, since it cannot happen that I am mistaken in saying 'I feel pain' (or 'I see a canary') because, although I do know of someone

¹It is an attempt to explain the seemingly guaranteed success of 'I' in a certain way: *We feel then that in the cases in which 'I' is used as subject we do not use it because we recognize a particular person by his bodily characteristics and this creates the illusion that we use this word to refer to something bodiless, which, however, has its seat in our body. In fact this seems to be the real ego, the one of which it was said 'Cogito, ergo sum'* (1958, p.69)

that he feels pain or that he sees a canary, I am mistaken in thinking that person to be myself¹.

According to Shoemaker, what protects avowals from such referential error is the fact that first-person ascriptions does not rely on an identification of the subject, so that self-reference is to be conceived as free from identification (of the referent of the expression).

Then, both Shoemaker and Evans state that uses of 'I' as subject do not imply a certain kind of self-identification:

My use of the word 'I' as the subject of my statement is not due to my having identified myself as something of which I know, or believe, or wish to say, that the predicate applies to it. (1968, p. 558)

Stressing its semantic affinity with demonstratives, 'I' is understood as a referential device capable of successful reference independently of the user's correct beliefs or judgements regarding the identity of the referent.

So, a speaker or thinker's success in picking out herself as the referent of 'I' does not involve an epistemic ability of recognizing an infallible target of reference, but depend only on her exercising ordinary basic abilities, such as *proprioception* and *kinesthetic sense*.

1.2. Moore's Paradox and the Mind's Transparency to the World

Following Wittgenstein, Evans criticizes the cartesian idea that '*self-knowledge always involve an inward glance at the states and doings of something to which only the person himself has access*' (1982, 225).

He underlines the importance of Moore's famous paradox for the conception of self-knowledge and the rejection of the detectivist model:

*In making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward—upon the world. If someone asks me, 'Do you think there is going to be a third world war?', I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were answering the question 'Will there be a third world war?' I get myself into the position to answer the question whether I believe that *p* by putting into operation whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether *p*. (1982, 225)*

This passage suggests that, in order to determine whether one believes that *p*, one must try to determine whether it is the case that *p*, and one does this by examining the relevant evidence regarding *p*.

Against the perceptual model of introspection, in this account the attention is directed away from the mental state and toward the external world instead.

Distinctively secure intentional self-ascriptions do not involve consulting evidence or making inferences about the ascribed state. They characteristically

¹It is relevant that this phenomenon occurs even in pathological cases, for instance that of complete amnesia.

involve direct or 'transparent' consideration of the objects or states of affairs they are about.

He states that our ability to ascertain our beliefs by looking outward at the beliefs' objects is attributed to the *transparency*¹ of intentional states: one's own intentional states are transparent to one in that one does not notice them as beliefs, but instead looks *through* them directly to their objects.

In most cases, we do not learn about our minds by as if it were gazing inward, rather we learn about our minds by reflecting on the aspects of the world that our mental states are about.

The transparency accounts of self-consciousness underline the outward focus of our thought in arriving at self-ascriptions, stressing the importance of the directionality to the world for self-knowledge.

Furthermore, the notion of *transparency* constitutes a significant feature of the asymmetry between first-personal intentional avowals and intentional ascriptions to others. Evans explains this asymmetry in terms of a different epistemic basis on which ascriptions are made (not in terms of a difference in the object of ascriptions).

The procedure identified by Evans is not one of recognizing in oneself the presence of a state with that content, but it involves a direct consideration of the ascribed belief's content and requires only that the subject exercises her normal abilities and dispositions for forming beliefs about the world.

So, we determine what we believe, think, hope, etc. not by studying our own behavior, or by examining the contents of our minds, but rather by putting ourselves in a position directly to consider the worldly objects and states of affairs that our thoughts, beliefs, etc. are about.

The notion of *transparency* has important implications on the theory of self-knowledge, since it emphasizes the cases in which it seems that one arrives at an accurate self-ascription not by means of attending to, or thinking about one's own mental states, but rather by means of attending to or thinking about the external states of the world that the target mental states are about.

2.What relation can be drawn between this semantic and epistemological analysis and some contemporary theories of First Person Perspective in the Philosophy of Mind's Debate?

2.1.Zahavi on Pre-Reflective Self-Awareness

Zahavi's works on subjectivity take an interdisciplinary perspective aimed at creating a dialogue between the phenomenological tradition and the analytical one, on the background of the contemporary debate about the nature of the mind.

With his theory of the *Minimal Self*, he underlines a minimal irreducible core of subjectivity, contrasting the naturalizing and reductivist tendencies about the human mind.

¹The kind of *transparency* at issue here is to be distinguished from the traditional notion of transparency, which has to do with the self-intimation and the clarity with which we are supposed to "grasp" our mental contents.

In this paper, I consider his notion of pre-reflective self-awareness in its relation with the phenomenon of *immunity from error through misidentification*, stressing its importance for an account of a *one-level theory of consciousness*, that contrasts the *higher-level theories of consciousness*.

The idea of pre-reflective self-consciousness is related to the phenomenon of *immunity from error through misidentification* relative to the first-person pronoun: when I experience an occurrent pain, perception, or thought, the experience in question is given to me immediately and noninferentially. I do not have to judge or appeal to some criteria in order to identify it as *my* experience.

Even in pathological cases, as in depersonalization or schizophrenic symptoms of delusions of control or thought insertion, a feeling or experience that the subject claims not to be his is nonetheless experienced by him as being part of his stream of consciousness.

This first-personal character entails an implicit experiential self-reference: if I feel hungry or see my friend, I cannot be mistaken about who the subject of that experience is, even if I can be mistaken about me being hungry (perhaps I am really thirsty), or about him being my friend (perhaps he is his twin), or even about whether I am actually seeing him (I may be hallucinating).

As Wittgenstein (1958), Shoemaker (1968), and others have pointed out, it is nonsensical to ask whether I am sure that *I* am the one who feels hungry. This is the phenomenon known as *immunity from error through misidentification* relative to the first-person pronoun.

To the wittgensteinian idea of 'grammatical immunity', the phenomenologist adds that whether a certain experience is experienced as mine, or not, does not depend upon something apart from the experience, but depends precisely upon the pre-reflective givenness that belongs to the structure of the experience itself.

Then, Zahavi criticizes the idea of self-consciousness as merely something that comes about the moment one scrutinizes one's experiences attentively (with reflection, introspection or higher-order monitoring), since it leads to consider the consciousness as an extrinsic property of the mental states that have it, bestowed externally upon them by other mental states.

According to a phenomenological account of consciousness (maintained by Husserl, but also by Sartre, Henry, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger), a minimal form of self-consciousness is a structural constant feature of conscious experience, that is experience happens for an experiencing subject in an immediate way and as part of this immediacy, it is implicitly marked as *my* experience.

This immediate and first-personal givenness of experiential phenomena must be accounted for in terms of a pre-reflective self-consciousness.

By calling it 'pre-reflective', Zahavi wants to emphasize that this type of self-consciousness does not involve an additional second-order mental state that in some way is directed in an explicit manner towards the experience in question:

Self-Consciousness must be understood as an intrinsic feature of primary experience. Moreover, it is not thematic or attentive or voluntarily brought about; rather, it is tacit, and very importantly, thoroughly non

observational (that is, it is not a kind of introspective observation of myself) and non-objectifying (that is, it does not turn my experience into a perceived object) (Zahavi and Gallagher, 2008, p.46).

Of course, it is always possible to reflect on and attend to our own experience, making it the *theme* or the *object* of attention, but reflective consciousness cannot be considered the model of the interpretation of human consciousness. It can have only a derivative sense in relation to the most basic and originary form of consciousness that pre-reflective self-awareness constitutes.

The notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness 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: to undergo a subjective experience necessarily means that there is something it is like for the subject to have that experience¹.

This is obviously true of bodily sensations like pain. But it is also the case for perceptual experiences, such as desiring, feeling, and thinking: as I live through the difference of experiences, there is something experiential that in some sense remains the same, namely their distinct first-personal character.

All the experiences are characterized by a quality of *mineness* or *for-me-ness*, the fact that it is I who am having these experiences. All the experiences are given, at least tacitly, as *my* experiences, as experiences *I* am undergoing or living through.

All of this suggests that the first-person experience presents me with an immediate and non-observational access to myself, and that consequently phenomenal consciousness entails a minimal form of self-consciousness. To put it differently, unless a mental process is pre-reflectively self-conscious there will be nothing it is like to undergo the process, and it therefore cannot be a phenomenally conscious process.

2.2. Moran on Transparency and Self-Knowledge

In *authority and Estrangement*, Moran emphasizes the *transparency* as the essential feature of intentional self-ascriptions, linking it to a *commitment account of self-knowledge* as a kind of self-shaping.

He recognizes that his theory is explicitly influenced on the one hand by Wittgenstein's reflections of the first-person and on the other by Sartre's idea that self-evaluation makes us responsible for our own mental states.

Following Wittgenstein, he contrasts the purely epistemic models of self-knowledge, stating that they do not do justice to the peculiar character of first person authority: the fact that in recognizing an attitude, one also implicitly endorses or *avows* it.

He argues that normally when we are prompted to think about what we believe, desire, or intend, we reflect on the outward phenomena in question and make up our minds about what to believe, desire, or do:

¹Zahavi underlines that this phenomenological analysis of consciousness converge with some analytical theories of consciousness, in particular with those of Searle (1992) and Nagel (1974).

We may allow any manner of inner events of consciousness, any exclusivity and privacy, any degree of privilege and special reliability, and their combination would not add up to the ordinary capacity for self-knowledge. For the connection with the avowal of one's attitudes would not be established by the addition of any degree of such epistemic ingredients. (Moran 2001, 93)

One who treats her own thoughts as simple objects of knowledge, without taking any responsibility for them, is 'self-alienated' and this complements Shoemaker's contention that failure to self-attribute thoughts may lead to treating oneself 'as a stranger'.

While we may have epistemic access to our own states which others lack, the commitment model holds that what is most distinctive about self-awareness is this: so long as a rational person attributes attitudes to herself as such, she must be committed to those attitudes.

The requirement that one be committed to one's self-attributed attitudes ties in with the transparency of mental states. Indeed, we reflect on our attitudes by directly considering their contents and it is because we consider our attitudes and their contents inseparably that we avoid pragmatic paradoxes such as that of Moore: 'It is raining but I believe that it isn't'.

Despite the fact that such statements may be true, one who utters them apparently fails to grasp that the subject whose attitudes are specified is identical to the person making the utterance. Grasping this identity will lead any rational person to self-attribute only those attitudes she endorses.

But whereas epistemic accounts explain this result by claiming that awareness of the lower-order state justifies (and causes) the self-attribution, the commitment model explains it by reference to the fact that avowing the state *commits* one to endorsing it¹.

Thus, Moran claims that first-person privilege is a matter of one's ability to regulate one's own states, and thereby to constitute oneself. This *self-constitution* account builds on the idea that we look outward to determine our beliefs².

However, on the self-constitution view mental states are in fact dynamically related to the first-person reflection. One's own mental states are not static entities merely to be observed: insofar as one is rational, in becoming aware of the state one subjects it to scrutiny. This line alleges that models of self-knowledge that treat what is special about self-knowledge as a purely epistemic matter are inadequate, since they neglect the fact that '*self-consciousness has specific consequences for the object of consciousness*' (Moran 2001, 28): for instance, awareness that one believes that p will, in a rational person, prompt

¹Because of its focus on non-epistemic responsibility and commitment, this model is especially relevant to debates in moral psychology.

²The objection to this idea, that this process yields a new belief rather than revealing a pre-existing belief, for the self-constitution view depends on a naïve picture of self-reflection. According to the naïve picture, mental states are stable particulars, awaiting discovery through introspection (the 'act-object' conception of self-knowledge, according to which introspection is a quasi-perceptual act of recognizing an independent object.)

the question whether p, so that one's 'p'-belief is open to influence by one's current evidence regarding p.

Rather than attempting to detect a pre-existing state, we open or re-open the matter and come to a resolution. Since we normally do believe, desire, and intend what we resolve to believe, desire, and do, we can therefore accurately self-ascribe those attitudes.

So, self-knowledge does not consist in simple observation of one's thoughts: if one simply reflects on the evidence regarding the state and does not evaluate its object, one may gain knowledge about states that are in fact one's own, but not knowledge about states conceived reflexively as one's own, that is, as 'mine'.

For conceiving a belief or intention as my own requires treating it as open to change. What is special about the method of knowing one's own states, on this view, is that we are each agents, relative to our own states: we are uniquely able to constitute ourselves.

Concluding remarks

Wittgenstein's observations on the peculiar character of the first personal uses of language, namely *avowals*, can be considered as the basis of a positive and not deflationarist analysis of the mind.

Indeed, they underline some fundamental aspects of the semantics and epistemology of the first person authority later developed by other thinkers: the aspect called by Shoemaker '*immunity from error through misidentification*' relative to the phenomenal avowals and the aspect called by Evans '*transparency*' of the mind to the world relative to the intentional avowals.

This semantic and epistemological analysis of the first person authority started by Wittgenstein influences in a positive way some theories of the first person authority in the contemporary philosophy of mind's debate, in particular those of Zahavi and Moran.

Zahavi develops Shoemaker's notion of *immunity from error through misidentification* stressing its importance for a *one-level theory of consciousness*, that contrasts the *higher-level theories of consciousness*.

Moran emphasizes Evans' concept of *transparency* of the mind to the world as the essential feature of intentional self-ascriptions, linking it to a *commitment account of self-knowledge* as a kind of shaping.

Bibliography

- Wittgenstein L., *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, ed. a cura di G. H. Von Wright e H. Nyman, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1982 (*Ultimi scritti, 1948-1951. La filosofia della psicologia*, trad. it di B. Agnese e di A. Gargani, Laterza, Roma, 1998).
- Wittgenstein L., *On Certainty*, Ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and V. H. von Wright, transl. Anscombe and Paul, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1977 (Wittgenstein L., *Della Certezza*, Einaudi, Torino, 1978).

- Wittgenstein L., *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, a cura di G.E.M. Anscombe, G.H. von Wright e R. Rhees, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1953 (*Ricerche filosofiche*, trad. it. di M. Trincherò, Einaudi, Torino 2002).
- Wittgenstein L., *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, ed G. E. M. Anscombe and V. H. Wright, transl. Anscombe and Luckhardt, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980. (*Osservazioni sulla filosofia della psicologia*, ed. it a cura di R. De Monticelli, Adelphi, Milano 1990).
- Wittgenstein L., *The Blue and Brown Books*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1958 (*Libro blu e libro marrone*, trad. it. di G. Conte, Einaudi, Torino 1983).
- Anscombe E., *The First Person*, in Guttenplan S., *Mind and Language*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Dorit B., *Speaking My Mind. Expression and Self Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.
- Evans G., *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1982.
- Finkelstein D., *Expression and the Inner*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 2003.
- Green M., *Self-Expression*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.
- Moran Richard, *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Shoemaker S., *Self Reference and Self-Awareness* in *Journal of Philosophy*, 65/19, 555-67.
- Shoemaker S., *The First Person Perspective and Other Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.
- Zahavi D., *Self-Awareness and Alterity: a phenomenological investigation*, Evaston, Northwestern University Press, 1999.
- Zahavi D., *Subjectivity and Selfhood. Investigating the First-Person Perspective*, the MIT Press, Cambridge, 2008.
- Zahavi D., Gallagher S., *The phenomenological Mind. An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*, Routledge, 2008.