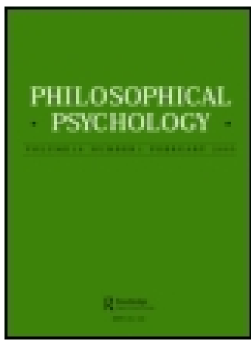

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REVIEW ESSAY

The minimal self needs a social update

Self and other: Exploring subjectivity, empathy, and shame, by Dan Zahavi, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, 304 pp., $49.95 (hardback), ISBN: 9780199590681

No one would deny that selfhood and intersubjectivity are deeply interrelated. But usually it is assumed that one first needs to understand the nature and structure of the self before one can determine how it is related to (the experience of) others. Dan Zahavi's most recent book is a thoughtful and very elaborate contribution to this project. The book departs from the assumption that in order to understand the self we have to start with its subjective and experiential dimension. The major hypothesis is that the self, in its most minimal and basic sense, consists of a prereflective sense of mineness and first-person givenness. Mineness refers not to particular experiential content but rather to *how* experiences are given: they are experienced as mine and thus as different from the experiences of others. This sense of mineness is considered a structural component of all phenomenal experiences. It is that which differentiates my experiential life from that of others (p. 22).

Zahavi's book is an intense read, and the reader should be prepared for a complex and very meticulous scholarly work. It offers an in-depth discussion of the minimal self, defending it against competing or alternatives models of the self and subjectivity and backing it up through a vast exegesis of phenomenological research on empathy, as well as studies in cognitive science. But while the book clearly centers on the discussion of the minimal self, Zahavi does not assume that a full theory of the self is exhausted by his approach. Zahavi therefore endorses a multidimensional approach to the self whereby the minimal and narrative self are complementary dimensions that can be bridged through a third aspect: empathy and the interpersonal self.

In this critical review, I take issue with Zahavi's general view of the relation between the minimal self and the social self, that is, that the minimal self is primary to the social self. I think Zahavi's observation is not entirely wrong, but because it is rather selective, neither is it entirely right. Clearly, human subjective experience reveals that my experiences are given to me as mine, and not as yours. And an authentic understanding of other minds presupposes the existence of (at least) two distinct experiential lives. However, extrapolating from this important phenomenological insight to a more general account of the minimal self risks developing a distorted and perhaps too idealistic picture of selfhood—a view on human existence that is, from the outset, separate and solipsistic: first we have a clear sense of self, as a distinct experiential subject, then we encounter others as others. While a sense of individuating mineness might be ubiquitous in much of adult human phenomenology, I believe that it is far from clear that it is given from birth and holds for all human self-experience. In his accounts of subjectivity and of intersubjectivity, Zahavi presumes a rather mature viewpoint on the subject, at the risk of downplaying its developmental, processual, and open nature. Contrary to the book's main hypothesis, I will argue that the relation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity is actually not as clean and clear-cut as Zahavi would have us believe.

In what follows, I first provide a summary of what I take to be some of the book's main arguments. Then I explain why I think that despite arguments to the contrary, Zahavi's approach can be interpreted as a solipsistic or individualist approach to the self. I outline an alternative view on the self, derived from the enactive approach to cognition, that can help to overcome this issue. Additionally, this view offers a route toward integrating the self's dimensions while emphasizing a process-based and dynamical perspective on both subjectivity and selfhood.

The book's basic line of argument is clearly reflected in its general structure, which consists of three parts. The first part comprises chapters 1 to 7 and offers an outline of the minimal self and

an elaboration of it by discussing a variety of objections to it, on the one hand, and by considering prominent dimensions of subjectivity, such as for instance temporality, on the other. The second part consists of chapters 8 to 12. In these chapters, Zahavi turns to the relation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, discussing in particular the role of empathy and social cognition. In the last part, comprising chapters 13 to 15, Zahavi discusses the self in its interpersonal dimension, exploring implications of the book's previous elaborations with regard to shame and the structure of so-called "we-experiences."

The short first chapter sets the stage for Zahavi's elaborations on the minimal self, discussing, rather selectively, competing accounts of the self and emphasizing that the diversity of approaches to the self calls for a renewed need for investigation into the nature of self and subjectivity. Zahavi focusses on Metzinger's neuro-philosophical self-model of subjectivity and Albahiri's Buddhist account of the self as illusory, objecting that both begin with a "reified notion of selfhood," according to which the self amounts to a rigid and substantial entity. Zahavi consequently rejects them as examples of an unwarranted and already outdated "ontological anti-realism," emphasizing that there are alternative approaches that do assume that the self exists. He calls attention to the fact that the self is actually already at play in other empirical disciplines, making any account that denies the existence of the self a non-starter. However, since the conceptual use of the self in the empirical sciences is far from clear, we still need to elucidate how different kinds of self experience and different dimensions of selfhood interrelate. Herein lies the motivation for Zahavi's book: to clarify, mainly from a phenomenological perspective, what the concept of the self minimally entails and how its different accounts and dimensions can be integrated.

The clearest definition of the minimal self is introduced in chapter 2. Drawing on Husserl, Zahavi argues that humans possess a pre-reflective sense of self that can be described as a sense of *for-me-ness* or *mineness*, which does not reflect the *what* but the *how* of experience: "It refers to the first-personal presence of all my experiential content … to the fact that experiences I am living through present themselves differently … to me than to anybody else" (p. 22).

To illustrate what he means by the dimension of mineness as a principle of individuation, Zahavi asks the reader to consider the following thought experiment: imagine two physiologically and psychologically identical twins—Mick and Mack—who currently both undergo a visual experience of looking at a white wall (p. 22). Upon adopting a third-person experience, we cannot tell the difference between the two. However, if we imagined that we actually *were* one of them, so Zahavi argues, then we could tell that there is a difference between them. Imagine you are Mick. Being Mick, the experience of the white wall is given only to you, from your first-person experience. The experience of the white wall differs from Mack's not with respect to the content (i.e., the whiteness of the wall) but with respect to *how* you experience it, that is, the particular first-person givenness of your experience of the wall's whiteness. This is what distinguishes your experience from Mack's, which is simply not part of your "experiential life" (p. 22–23).

Zahavi's general strategy for the remaining chapters is then to discuss alternative approaches or complementary dimensions of the self and to clarify, by contrast, what the minimal self is *not*. Zahavi thereby seeks to avoid two extreme alternatives: the view that there is no difference between the self and others, on the one hand, and that the sense of self is co-constructed with others or a derived phenomenon, on the other.

According to the first, the so-called argument from "anonymity," subjective experience does not entail mineness or a sensed difference from others, but is more accurately described as an immersion in the world, or as what Dreyfus has called "absorped coping." The idea is that we are prereflectively attuned to the world by simply being in it (Dreyfus, 2013, p. 21). Zahavi rejects this argument because it arguably misses the actual target by already presupposing a rather sophisticated version of phenomenal self-consciousness of "oneself *as* oneself" or of "who one is" (p. 28). However, for Zahavi, the minimal self is actually much more basic; it is about our "distinctly different acquaintance with our own experiential life than with the experiential life of others (and vice versa)" (p. 28).

The other argument is discussed within the context of the so-called narrative or normative self. The narrative approach would deny that we can infer from subjective experience to the nature of the self. The self is derived, because it is socially constructed. Zahavi does not entirely reject this account, but he emphasizes that the narrative approach cannot ground a full account of the self. Before using concepts and language, we already have a prereflective and pre-linguistic acquaintance with our own experiences. The narrative approach thus "has to be supplemented by an account that specifically targets the first-person character of our experiential life" (p. 59).

Before moving to the second part of the book where he turns to the relation between selfhood and intersubjectivty, in chapter 7, Zahavi offers a brief summary of the previous elaborations and proposes what he calls a "multidimensional model" of the self. Except for the no-self positions (discussed in the introduction) that he dismisses as "anti-selfers and ego-phobes," Zahavi holds that the notion of a minimal self is compatible not only with other accounts of experiential subjectivity but also with the social and narrative account of selfhood. Zahavi thus endorses a *pluralistic* approach: "We shouldn't accept being forced to choose between viewing selfhood as either a socially constructed achievement or an innate and culturally invariant given. Who we are is as much made as found" (p. 90). Both dimensions, the minimal experiential and the constructed social, thus complement each other. And yet, despite this apparent pluralism, it is clear that Zahavi prioritizes the minimal self and posits, in line with Husserl, some basic hierarchical order: the minimal self is primary and "pre-social" (pp. 11, 96)—it is a prerequisite for other, more sophisticated, dimensions of selfhood.

Having defended and elaborated the notion of the minimal self in this way, in the second part of the book (chapters 8–12), Zahavi then considers the relation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In the beginning of chapter 8, he clarifies once again what his general view on the relation between selfhood and intersubjectivity is: they co-exist, but they do not co-constitute each other (p. 95). A differentiated subjective viewpoint is a prerequisite for being able to encounter the other. In order to bridge both accounts, Zahavi considers empathy, which allows for the transition between the subjective and interpersonal dimensions through intersubjective engagement. Understanding others "crucially depends upon the ability to project one's own psychical states into others" (p. 98).

The second part of the book (chapters 8–12) thus begins with an in-depth exegesis of phenomenological research on empathy and understanding others, considering authors such as Lipps, Stein, Husserl, Scheler, and Schütz. It is beyond the scope of this review to trace the many lines of argument and dimensions that Zahavi considers here, but any scholar interested in intersubjectivity and social cognition will find these chapters an excellent and clear resource on the phenomenological contribution to this subject matter. Note that in the face of the vast and diverse research on empathy, Zahavi himself adopts a rather modest viewpoint. He does not seek to determine *the* exact definition of empathy; instead, he hopes that modern research on social cognition can benefit from the insights of phenomenology and incorporate them accordingly (p. 152). Nevertheless, it becomes clear that Zahavi actually does endorse a particular interpretation of empathy in that he tends to agree with those approaches that lend support to his main hypothesis, especially Husserl and Sartre.

So what is the notion of empathy that Zahavi relies on? And what role could empathy play for research on social cognition? According to Zahavi, the general phenomenological view on empathy boils down to the following statement derived from Husserl: empathy is "a distinct form of other-directed intentionality, which allows the other's experiences to disclose themselves as other rather than as our own" (p. 151). It is the "experience of the embodied mind of the other, an experience which, rather than eliminating the difference between self-experience and other-experience, takes the asymmetry to be a necessary and persisting fact" (p. 151). In other words, empathy is the basic capacity to appreciate the other as another minded being (p. 167).

Having carved out this general phenomenological proposal for empathy, Zahavi goes on to discuss its implications for current research on social cognition, such as simulation theory and theory-theory, according to which understanding others involves either a direct apprehension through automatic embodied simulation or imitation, or a more sophisticated process requiring one to project one's own mental state onto that of the other. Zahavi seeks to position the minimal self as an intermediate

answer between them. The direct bodily acquaintance of others suggested by the phenomenologists does not mean that the distinction between self and other is removed. Instead, empathy is a form of understanding others, which clearly respects the already existing minimal difference between subjects, as distinct experiential selves. This difference is "constitutional. It is precisely because of this difference, precisely because of this asymmetry, that we can claim that the minds we experience are *other* minds" (p. 166). Empathy cannot be equated with "mirroring and matching" (p. 160). Instead, it is better described as a dance, as a complementary project (p. 166).

Zahavi admits that this phenomenological approach to empathy is limited and that "social cognition comes in many different forms" (p. 186). Importantly, empathy does not reveal every detail of another person's mind. This leaves the possibility open that some aspects of other people's mental lives are apprehended through more sophisticated forms of social cognition, say, mind-reading. Alternative views, such as the mentioned simulation approach and more inferential and theory-driven accounts of social understanding, are therefore not altogether implausible but, rather, complementary to the phenomenological view of social cognition. Nevertheless, Zahavi believes that empathy should occupy a particular and more basic role than all other accounts on social cognition; for while it might not reveal a person's mental state in all its specificity, it surely constitutes the very basic acquaintance with the fact *that* other people are mental beings and with the general *what* of their mental states (p. 185).

What should have become clear from the previous considerations is that Zahavi's accounts of subjectivity and intersubjectivity are actually rather mature: we are presented with human subjects that, from the onset, fully own their experiences and that encounter each other while respecting a clear difference between themselves as themselves and the other as other. More accurately yet, we can encounter each other *precisely because* they (and we) already own their experiences: "the reason why the other is an other, is precisely because he or she is also an experiential self, with his or her own irreplaceable first-person perspective" (p. 189).

But the question I would like to ask here is whether this perfect differentiation could really serve as the paradigm case for minimal (inter-)subjectivity? Is the experience of a perfectly owned self the right point of departure for assessing what is basic or minimal to (experiential) selfhood? I doubt this and argue instead that not only is the experienced differentiation exceptional, but also that it is a *developmental* achievement, rather than a given. While it might reflect the sense of selfhood at a particular point in the lifetime of a mature or adult (Western) human being, it is questionable that it is encompassing enough to account for the minimal selfhood throughout a person's life and that it is general enough to ground a cross-culturally plausible account of minimal subjectivity.

However, before questioning the plausibility of the presumed clear-cut experiential differentiation, we should perhaps ask on what grounds exactly Zahavi is able to argue for it. Explicitly, Zahavi's account of minimal selfhood is based on pure first-personal, phenomenological insight. However, I think that the thought experiment of Mick and Mack, which Zahavi introduces to clarify first-person givenness, leaves room for an additional interpretation, which is actually based on a third-person perspective. It has to do with an aspect of selfhood that Zahavi occasionally mentions and quite clearly relies on, namely embodiment. According to phenomenology, we are not minds independent from our bodies, but rather intentional bodily beings (pp. 186–187). In line with classical Husserlian thinking, my sense of self is thus partly derived by analogy from apprehending the other as an embodied being. However, the primacy of subjectivity still lies with the transcendental ego. Yet, I suggest that embodiment could actually also be the basis for arguing that experienced mineness is primary. Recall the gist of the argument that we cannot tell the difference between the two experiences of whiteness from a third-person perspective. We have to be one of them in order to appreciate the difference. I think that on a closer look, however, it turns out that it is actually *he,* Zahavi as author and observer, who "finalizes" the differentiation between the two subjects by positing Mick's experiential givenness against the existence of Mack's. How so?

The positing of two experiential subjects is not merely achieved by asking readers to put themselves into Mick's or Mack's shoes; it is also available because Mick and Mack are *two bodily distinct beings*. The distinction between their experiential lives thus also seems to be based on the fact that they are

observed as *bodily separable*, as two different organismic entities. In other words, the sense of mineness and for-me-ness seems to be grounded in the fact that I am a singular organismic being, physiologically distinct from other bodily beings. On the one hand, this actually gives room for a more socially derived account of the minimal self, in the sense that Zahavi's own observational act of contrasting two bodily subjects might implicitly stand for what might be inherent to the minimal self, namely that it is developed and requires a more-than-individual process. Subjects might enjoy experiential differentiation from others precisely through engaging in a relational process with them in the first place.

But on the other hand, Zahavi's reliance on embodiment seems to be much more third-person and ontological in nature, and his argument rests upon an implicit equation of the minimal self with the body. From this perspective, Zahavi's proposal actually bears some interesting overlap with two explicitly bodily approaches to selfhood, Damasio's (2006) *core self* and Henry's (2004) notion of *auto-affection*. The main difference between them is that while the former adopts a third-person view, explaining the self as an organismic capacity emerging from integrating relations between worldly objects and the organism, the latter is first-person, describing the experiential "backside" of the lived, world-directed body: the immanent sense of being affected by and passively acquainted with oneself. I am not sure why Zahavi does not discuss Henry's approach, since it seems very closely related to his own proposal, but the more important point I would like to make is that grounding the sensed differentiation from others in the organismic body amounts, however carefully one might put this, to an individualistic or solipsistic view on both selfhood and embodiment.

Zahavi, perhaps not surprisingly, foresees this worry. In chapter 12, he comes back to the argument from anonymity and the risk of solipsism. Let me provide a rather lengthy quotation, since it captures so poignantly my single most important concern with the book:

> Some have claimed that the only way to solve the problem of intersubjectivity and avoid a threatening solipsism is by conceiving of the difference between self and other as a founded and derived difference, a difference arising out of an undifferentiated anonymous life. However, as should have become clear by now, this 'solution' does not solve the problem of intersubjectivity, it *dissolves* it. To speak of a fundamental anonymity prior to any distinction between self and other obscures that which has to be clarified, namely, intersubjectivity understood as the relation between subjectivities. On the level of this fundamental anonymity there is neither individuation nor selfhood, but nor is there any differentiation, otherness, or transcendence, and there is consequently room for neither subjectivity nor intersubjectivity. To put it differently, the fundamental anonymity thesis threatens not only our concept of a self-given subject; it *also threatens our notion of an irreducible other* [emphasis added]. (p. 189)

In other words, Zahavi quite simply accepts the solipsism that comes with his approach to subjectivity. In fact, he even welcomes it. We need a "commitment to an egological account of consciousness" (p. 189) and need to presuppose a "sphere of absolute personal privacy" (p. 190, quoting Scheler) because it avoids the risk of immersion with others and the collapse into an anonymous being with them. This also explains why Zahavi, despite rejecting the narrative approach to the self in order to preserve a prereflective and embodied acquaintance with others, also dismisses Gallese's proposal that understanding others relies on embodied simulation, which automatically and quite passively overcomes the gap between self and other (pp. 155–159). Direct embodied acquaintance with others does not rule out that there is a persisting boundary between subjects.

But why does saving the subject from immersion require an egological view? And why must the minimal sense of self be primarily constituted through the body and not be socially derived? Zahavi's response is part of what I have elsewhere called the "body-social problem" (Kyselo, 2014). The body-social problem is concerned with the question of how bodily and social aspects figure in the individuation of the human subject, and it captures a dilemma for the modern debate in philosophy and cognitive science. The first horn of the dilemma is in accordance with Zahavi's transcendental ego—the assumption of a primary subject, an essentially embodied view on the self (individual agent), according to which humans are ready-made, isolated subjects parachuted into a world of others—an embodied solipsism (Kyselo, 2014). The alternative would be precisely what Zahavi wants to avoid in his defense against the anonymity claim: to adopt a social view of the self, according to which subjectivity is co-constituted (or a view on intersubjectivity as presupposing undifferentiated subjects). This view

presents us with the other horn of the dilemma, for it amounts to an immersion with others or the "constant danger of lapsing into a monism that in the end would be indistinguishable from solipsism" (p. 192, Zahavi paraphrasing Sartre). We are left with the unfortunate choice of positing either an egological or solipsistic bodily subject or of risking its loss in a disembodied immersion with others.

However, the dilemma entails at least two debatable presuppositions: the first is that the body is primarily a center of individuation and differentiation from others, and the second is that a social or socially derived approach to the self must either be linguistically constructed and, thus, potentially disembodied or presuppose a claim from anonymity and immersion.

Fortunately, the view that selves must clearly be distinguished from the outset or risk losing all boundaries is not the only game in town. There is a well-known embodied approach in philosophy of cognitive science which might offer an alternative framework. It deals with the relation between agent and the (social) world and, like Zahavi, aims at an integration of phenomenology with scientific and empirical research on the mind. What I have in mind is the enactive approach to cognition (Jonas, 2001; Kyselo, 2014; Maturana & Varela, 1980; Thompson, 2007; Varela, 1997; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993; Weber & Varela, 2002). From an enactive perspective, the relationship between the minimal self, body, and others is actually turned on its head, offering an account of self and others that is actually quite compatible with the phenomenological and philosophical accounts that argue for a derived differentiation of subjectivity (e.g., by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Mead, or even Scheler), but that Zahavi dismisses (pp. 91, 131, 187, 192). I wonder whether this is also the reason why he does not mention the enactive approach to cognition at all?

For present purposes, I would like to focus on the enactive notion of *autonomy* and *sense-making* (Barandiaran, Di Paolo, & Rohde, 2009; Di Paolo, 2005; Di Paolo, Rohde, & De Jaegher, 2010; Kyselo, 2014; Thompson, 2007). The key idea behind *autonomy* concerns the genesis of a cognitive agent's identity as a product of its own *ongoing* interaction with the environment. Identity is never a given, but continuously enacted and thus conceived of in terms of a self-organized, operationally closed network of processes that comprise organismic *and* environmental processes. It is thus basically a relational and distributed phenomenon. The notion of *sense-making* then refers to the behavioral and interactive side of the autonomous system and basically entails that with the generation of an identity, a perspective arises from which a system evaluates its behaviors and interactions with the world adaptively (Thompson & Stapleton, 2009). What matters to a given system depends on the kind of organizational identity it embodies.

In the logic of enactive identity generation, the existence of other subjects is reflected in the organization of their identity as well as in identity experiential dimension. This is because the world we are embedded in is a social world. Ontologically speaking, we no longer appear as egological islands. The constitution of subjectivity through being-in-the world proposes alternatively that the self is indeed derived and developed. It emerges from our being-with others and is co-constituted in a joint organizational process through interpersonal relations (Kyselo, 2014). Subjects are thus not individuated qua being a body and by individual biological processes alone. The enactive view of the self rather acknowledges the body's intentional relation to the world, which resists a clear-cut boundary between subjectivity and the world. Because our body is intentionally related to the world, it is also open and should thus be seen as a mediator of the self's ongoing relational organizational make-up rather than as its "once and for all" individuating principle. Phenomenologically speaking, our sense of self entails not only a sense of differentiation but also of openness and readiness to be affected by the world and thus also by others. This is precisely what Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and others, contrary to Zahavi's interpretation, have argued for: subjectivity is not only a reflection of a given individual separate existence, but also of the ongoing worldly and interpersonal relational processes from which it emerges.

Our embodied relations with others make up the self's basic organization and provide what it takes to maintain it. And what it takes is an ongoing acquaintance with the world, which entails a crucial point: being a self depends on making (or having) experiences and, therefore, also on interactions with the world and with others that can bring them about. Without engagement with the world and the experience it brings about, nothing would matter and no action would or could be taken to ensure

that the organization of the self is preserved. It is through bodily experiences and engagement with others that we can apprehend this, that is, develop and have a perspective on our own state and on the environment. In contrast to Zahavi's minimal self, the enactive approach thus holds that the intentional relation of subjectivity to the world is part and parcel of its own unfolding, suggesting a less static and more derived and distributed view of selfhood. The experience of self is derived, since subjectivity and the world are inextricably intertwined. The sense of self is not merely bodily, but, even in its most minimal sense, social (De Haan, 2010).

What prevents us from falling onto either horn of the body-social dilemma is the introduction of time, of development, as well as of viewing the self as deeply relational. There is a much more basic perspective on the social self according to which the sense of self also comprises a "pre-reflective sociality" (De Haan, 2010). This form of sociality is common to both the narrative and the immersion view, without, however, coinciding with either one of them. The enactive view does not deny that there are distinguishable subjects. It questions, however, how this difference is brought about. The idea is that differentiation is a continuous organizational process that that structures our immersive being-with others. Our body mediates this process and is reciprocally, continuously shaped by doing so. This also means we can never fully escape immersion because only an openness to the world ensures that we can have the experiences and create the relations necessary to generate the differentiation from it. Subjectivity is derived from immersion while exerting a continuous resistance against it. We need others, and at the same time, we can never fully become one with them. If being a self were primarily about being separate from others, we would ultimately risk isolation from others and thus a solipsistic ego. Yet at the same time the self can also not be completely open to others, for as Zahavi correctly points out, this would risk its immersion in the interaction, and the loss of boundaries from others.

The key thus lies in considering subjective differentiation as a precarious endeavor emerging from a continuous attempt to negotiate two opposing types of behavioral tendencies, *distinction*, pertaining to the need for emancipation and separation, and *participation,* pertaining to the openness towards others and to our belonging to the social world (Kyselo, 2014). Subjectivity is brought forth through the ongoing attempt to overcome a paradox without ever fully doing so.

The enactive approach to the self would overcome the body-social problem by rejecting the choice between either positing an ego or rejecting an ego. It would question both the Husserlian-Zahavian transcendental ego in the sense of a perfectly distinguished subject from others and the Buddhist or neuroscientifically reduced no-self. Instead, the self is what organizes the joint space we are immersed in, bringing about bodily subjects as identifiable but socially dependent and ever-evolving reflexive viewpoints.

From an enactive viewpoint, and in clear contrast to Zahavi, the minimal self is relational and does not exist independently of our social interactions with the world. It is minimal in the sense that it captures the most basic requirement for there to be a self, both phenomenologically and ontologically speaking: a socially co-constituted organizational process that integrates two opposing movements: mineness and openness. Without granting that subjectivity is relational at its core, there would be either immersion or social death (Guenther, 2013). The task of phenomenology and research on social cognition is thus not to understand intersubjective experiences as a particular dimension of the subject's relation *to* the world, as Zahavi (2005) has it. Rather subjectivity is already and essentially social.

As a consequence, the question of understanding others might then after all be about direct access, or better yet about an *excess of access*, to them. It is a question about understanding how humans apprehend and organize their direct attunement and the common ground that already exists between them. Understanding others is to appreciate this same fact, that "the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behavior in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 413). Thus, we understand each other by making sense and organizing our pre-existing connection and immediate access to the world and to each other. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity are indeed closely intertwined, not in the sense of presupposing perfectly distinguished bodily subjects, but rather through subjects that keep relating to one another. Through communication and through dialogue (embodied *and* linguistically mediated), we explore

our joint existence and together establish the boundaries between us, dynamically co-creating both individual and shared meaning. From this point of view, the actual problem of understanding others is then perhaps more about the basic vulnerability and struggle involved in this process (Benjamin, 1995). It is a problem of a need and lack of recognition, and a problem of the limitation and freedom that arise as necessary sides of a dialogue, which, just like our self, never evolves by individual means but only through and in relating to others.

To conclude, the minimal self is probably not pre-social, but continuously developed and maintained by organizing the social relations that exist between individuals as soon as they enter the social world. Mineness is not simply grounded in individual organismic embodiment, but better through what we might call an active and "open body" that continuously engages or relates to others and so *becomes* social. Our sensed distinction from others is a fragile achievement, an emergent process, which presupposes a continuous dialogue with others. It should thus be comprehended in conjunction with a second basic dimension of minimal selfhood: a sense of *openness* and *readiness to be affected by others*.

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