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Symposium on *The World, the Flesh and the Subject*  
by Paul Gilbert and Kathleen Lennon

Edited by Luca Malatesti and Michael Peckitt

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# Book Symposium on *The World, the Flesh and the Subject* by Paul Gilbert and Kathleen Lennon\*

## A Reuniting of the Ways<sup>1</sup>

Michael Peckitt

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### 1 The Parting of the Ways

No one can identify the moment when the great separation occurred. Some say it was with alternative readings of Kant, others with the debate between Husserl and Frege, and others with the debate between Heidegger, Carnap and Cassirer. I personally believe that it was not any one particular event, except that the different reactions to Kant that emerged through the late 1700's and 1800's made the debates of the early 1900's possible. By the time of Heidegger/Carnap/Cassirer debates were over, there had definitely been a tangible parting of the ways. Whereas before everyone was studying philosophers or philosophical problems, now one side of the philosophical world produced 'philosophy of mind' or 'ethics' and the other produced interpretations of Descartes and Kant's Moral Theory. The supposed analytic/continental divide was born.

Times change and whilst the divide between analytic and continental philosophy has closed a little, if it ever truly existed, the perceived differences are just as nuanced now as they were for Husserl and Frege. The gulf between the Rhine and Danube<sup>2</sup> may be narrower, but it is no less shallow. There are still arguments about the correct interpretation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the relevance of Hegel as a philosopher, whether Derrida is philosopher at all, the list is endless. There is one exception; one concept which crosses the divide from Continental thinking to Analytic Philosophy of Mind - Intentionality, the idea that consciousness always has an object. The idea began life in Brentano, lived on through Husserl and Heidegger and is now commonplace whether it be in Fodor, Dennett, Putnam and Kim, to name but a few.

### 2 The Mandate of Continental Philosophy in Philosophy of Mind

So Intentionality has been useful, but what gives the philosopher the right to introduce any more 'continental themes'? There are certainly plenty of continental thinkers who have something to say about the Mind, the Post-Husserl phenomenologists - Sartre, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Freud on Desire, Lacan and Foucault on Subjectivity, Gadamer on Understanding. However Analytic Philosophy of Mind was doing perfectly well with Descartes and Locke, why introduce more and with what right would one do this?

Gilbert's and Lennon's response to this question is that the dominant paradigm in Philosophy of Mind, which is a broadly functionalist simply fails to explain our actions. It fails to do so, because

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• Gilbert and Lennon 2005.

1 In the interest of intellectual honesty, the title is borrowed from Friedman 2000.

2 Michael Dummett's phrase from Dummett 1993.

## 2 *A Reuniting of the Ways I*

our understanding of them *as* actions are context bound. Understanding a certain action depends on certain factors about the world, yet this ‘world’ is something for which functionalism cannot account. Secondly, functionalism cannot give account of the subjective character of experience, that something *feels* a particular way. Thus Gilbert and Lennon identify two characteristics lacking in the functionalist story - “...of intentionality and of consciousness respectively...” (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 2). Despite its prevalence in Philosophy of Mind, the dominant paradigm is the one place where an adequate story about consciousness and intentionality is absent.

Gilbert and Lennon wish to develop an alternative approach, one that takes three elements into account. Firstly it will tell an explanatory story about actions that can take into account what functionalism leaves out - *the world*. The intelligibility of actions, and sensations, emotions, desire and our agency is dependent on the world in which we live, and “the way the world presents itself to us.” (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 2). To accomplish this first task, a hermeneutical-phenomenological approach is necessary, and thus Gilbert and Lennon rummage through the resources of continental philosophy, looking at Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Lyotard, amongst others to make their case.

Secondly, Gilbert and Lennon offer a story in which the body is central and in sense seen as natural, but not as the purely physical entity that science talks of, and not as separate from the mind, for Gilbert and Lennon, the concepts of mind and body are intertwined.<sup>3</sup> The body is ‘natural’ in that it is the ordinary way we experience the world, the ‘organ of experience’- *as flesh*. As flesh, or embodied agents, Gilbert and Lennon aim to show how the agent “is related to the world” something that the functionalist paradigm fails to do.

Finally, we arrive at the final element, *the subject*. Gilbert and Lennon;

...aim to bring out...the connection between the way things in the world are experienced and the way our bodies are affected and react to them. (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 3)

It should be made clear that Gilbert and Lennon never profess to be offering a theory<sup>4</sup>, but rather by using sometimes seemingly disparate thinkers offer an alternative story to the functionalist one - the title of the book “The World, the Flesh and the Subject: Continental Themes in Philosophy of Mind” was I believe, chosen carefully. As such they recognize that some of the thinkers used in their work have conflicting theoretical positions and presuppositions, and where they do clash have attempted to resolve the conflict - such as in their discussion of Merleau-Ponnty and Lyotard on experience. The authors also freely admit to not offering a defence of their positions. They are trying to start discussion, to begin building the bridge between the Rhine and Danube. I personally hope that someone will hear their cries.

## References

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3 Gilbert and Lennon 2005, p. 3.

4 Gilbert and Lennon 2005.

# **Précis of *The World, the Flesh and the Subject***

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In a previous work, Burwood, Gilbert and Lennon 1998, we have criticised the dominant paradigm in Anglo- American approaches to the area for its inability to address issues of intentionality and consciousness, as a consequence of its neglect of perspectivity and our embodied engagement with the world. This book, Gilbert and Lennon 2005, aims to develop an alternative by paying attention to the way psychological states explain behaviour by revealing an aspect of the agents perspective on to the world. The explanation concerned here is not a causal but a rationalising one. We understand the behaviour once we grasp that from the perspective of the agent what she does is appropriate to the way the world is for her. The alternative paradigm we develop then is both hermeneutic , in addressing the intelligibility of our responses to the world, and phenomenological by addressing how the world appears to us as we act. Since it is principally Continental philosophers who have adopted this approach it is these that we make most use of. We make use not only of hermeneutic and phenomenological sources, but also strands of psychoanalytic, poststructuralist and feminist writings. In doing so we try to shed light on certain key psychological concepts: perception, sensation, imagination, desire , emotion and agency. What serves as an argument for our approach is simply its fecundity in elucidating such concepts. In this work philosophy of mind becomes intertwined with philosophy of the body, the flesh of our title. In the process of articulation of key psychological phenomena the way in which they are bodily phenomena is brought to the fore. We aim to bring out the intertwining of the way things in the world are experienced and the manner in which our bodies are affected by and react to them. This then brings to the fore our third element, the subject, whose place in the world is as the centre of an embodied perspective onto it. The constitution of such subjectivity derives from its bodiliness, the world it experiences and its interactions with other subjectivities.

## **1 The Character of Experience**

Sensory perceptions and bodily sensations are paradigms of mental states that have a subjective character: there is something it is like to have them. Continental philosophers, like Sartre, have typically rejected accounts of this which postulate “contents” of experience, over and above the objects to which such experience is directed; so how is its subjective character to be explained? Heidegger approaches the question by first asking what it is like to live in the world as we do, when it is the availability of things around us that matters. The content of our perceptions is a world salient and significant to us, usable in the pursuit of our projects We are only concerned with visual sensations per se, he suggests, when things go wrong, or when we take a break from active engagement with the world. Their subjective character in these circumstances is, therefore, no indication of what experience is like for us in other situations. Merleau-Ponty develops Heidegger’s account by viewing our existence in the world as primarily “pre-objective” i.e. as that of embodied agents manipulating things unreflectively, rather than that of subjects set over against the objects of our experience. Intentionality is in the first place, therefore, the “motor intentionality” of my body

#### 4 *Précis of The World, the Flesh and the Subject*

acting, as it were, autonomously upon objects. Here, as elsewhere, Merleau-Ponty explains what an experience is like in terms of our bodily propensities to act in relation to it.

For neither philosopher, however, is what our experience is like exhausted by an account of its intentional content. This content captures what the experience gives us grounds, other things being equal, for believing about the world, whether such a belief is reflective or merely presupposed by the way we unreflectively act. But we can allow that experiences can ground the same belief and yet differ in their subjective character without postulating some mysterious phenomenal content. Rather they differ in ways that reflect our different modes of engagement with the world and the distinctive ways in which our bodies react to things in these modes. Typically such experiences will differ in the attitudes or feelings towards things that they involve, as in the difference between casually taking in familiar surroundings and cautiously observing unfamiliar ones, or between merely being aware of the colours of things and becoming absorbed in them. We grasp what such experiences are like because we have shared bodily reactions, for reasons both physiological and cultural, and we can therefore see how, in certain circumstances, someone can have a reason for reacting as they do, as well as for the beliefs about the world she is thereby led to.

### 2 The Constraints of Experience

The problem which confronts accounts of experience like those of Heidegger and the early Merleau-Ponty is that, in rejecting “contents” of experience which are given prior to conceptualisation, they fail to capture the way that that experiences are something over and above what we make of them in treating them as reasons for action. For they are only that because they somehow exceed their role in our purposive activity by revealing a world in which this activity is not just successful or unsuccessful, but a response to something beyond its subject which, through experience, controls her acts. This problem of how experience can possibly point to something beyond itself in giving us reasons for action continues to pre-occupy philosophers, like McDowell. Yet the later Merleau-Ponty, Lyotard and Levinas have already confronted it and offered a number of fruitful suggestions on how to resolve it.

The later Merleau-Ponty develops a notion of the “flesh” as the common element between the subject and object of experience, drawing upon the fact that it is through the body that things act upon us, so that our bodies can be both subject and object, as when we touch ourselves. We can, perhaps, reinterpret this suggestion in terms of an appeal to the body as a causal mechanism whose operation can nonetheless provide us with reasons, rather than merely stimuli, because we each feel the effects of things on the body in the same way, and, consequently, as making our reactions intelligible. Thus what may seem from an observer’s standpoint purely causal, a shared subjective viewpoint can reveal as rational, and yet involving a response to what is other than ourselves, rather than to a merely internal happening.

Lyotard regards Merleau-Ponty as having failed to account for the “event” to which we do respond in experience. His own suggestion is that we should attend to the indeterminate features of experience, prior to focussing on something and making it the intentional object of our awareness. This indeterminacy always exceeds any such determination in potentially grounding other judgments or producing other bodily reactions. It is this fact which shows that what we here experience is something which exceeds anything we bring to it, and is, indeed, the “event” revealed in all experience, which must start from such indeterminacy.

Levinas had earlier investigated states even less connected with the conceptualisation of objects of experience, for example the experience of physical suffering. Paradoxically he finds that even here we are responding to something other than ourselves, for we are passive in the face of what assails us, and our bodily reactions are wrung out of us involuntarily. It is these reactions which, Levinas holds (like Wittgenstein), are basic to our life in the world, prior to any engaged activity in it, and which reveal something beyond us to which we are reacting. Again, as for Merleau-Ponty, it is the sharing of reactions which renders experience intelligible; so that “things acquire a rational

significance, and not only one of simple usage, because an other is associated with my relations with them.” And Levinas thinks of these relations as founded on reactions to another’s suffering or enjoyment. It is, again, the involuntariness of bodily reactions which forms the basis of the more complex control of thought by our experience of what is other than ourselves.

### **3 Imagination and the Imaginary**

In this chapter we distill a concept of the imaginary with which to make good the claim that our mode of embodied subjectivity is an imaginary embodiment in an imaginary world. The concept of the imaginary which we are employing is not one in which imaginary worlds are contrasted to real worlds. The imagined world is rather the form which we give to our corporeal bodies and our material world. Imagined worlds are not inner images projected onto a neutral world. A world can only be a world for us by means of the operation of the imagination. There is no neutral world to which we can gain access . The images and forms in terms of which our imagined worlds are constituted carry in an interdependent way both cognition and affects. Consequently the imagined relation is an affective relation to the world. To view the world affectively is not simply to see it as containing certain potentialities for actions but to see such actions as appropriate or desirable, invested with possibilities of pleasure and pain.

Our imaginary bodies and imaginary worlds are mutually constitutive. We imagine our bodies in terms of their potentiality for action which requires an imagined world. Moreover imagining the world in a certain way is to view it in terms of possibilities for *our* existence. Imagining the world is a mode of being in relation to it. Nonetheless these imagined worlds are not private. Where such imagined worlds are not illusory there is an implicit publicness to the forms they can take. The appropriateness of the imaginary form must be recognisable by those who can grasp the point of view.

The link between imaginary worlds and embodied points of view explains differences within different peoples imaginary worlds and the same persons imaginary world at different, (and sometimes the same), time. It must not, however, obscure the role of the social . Firstly our encounters with objects and significant others forms our imaginary embodiment through which our world gains its imaginary form. Secondly through our participation in social groups we are initiated into social imaginaries which make possible shared responses to the world and consequently shared forms of life.

Imagined configurations have a resilience which makes their displacement more than a simple(!) matter of appealing to considerations of truth or falsity. Crucially it involves encounters with alternative imagined configurations, which can be recognised as making both cognitive and affective sense.

### **4 Desire**

We would like to suggest that an account of desire does not need to rest on depth accounts anchored in biological processes or fundamental drives. Instead we can view desire as our own imagined becomings in relation to an imagined world. Such a view borrows from phenomenological accounts a recognition that desire is a mode of experiencing the world as desirable, a mode in which the imagined shape of the interdependent world and self is revealed by our responsiveness to it. It borrows from surface accounts the awareness that such imagined shapes are discursively constituted. This picture allows that our desires should be intelligible to ourselves and others, and not promptings which we simply stumble across in our inner streams of consciousness. The imaginary shape, which our world takes, reflects both personal histories and cultural initiation. It can, however, have an unpredictability and singularity which outruns both. Judith Butler, while recognizing the operation of power in the social constitution of desirability, nonetheless signals an excessiveness to desire which outruns it. For Deleuze desiring encounters reflect the singularity and

## 6 *Précis of The World, the Flesh and the Subject*

contingency of bodies encountering each other, in ways not susceptible to generalization.

Many of the accounts we discuss share the insight that desire constitutes the subject in process. Freud's opposition of the life instincts to the death instincts; the insistence on desiring as a process in Lacan; Sartre's impulse towards being; and the forward movement of change and becoming which we take from Deleuze; each tries to capture desire as that which yields a subject in the process of becoming. This process prevents fixity and determination, and yields a temporal dimension to subjectivity.

### 5 Emotion

The principal problem in understanding emotions is to see how their affective aspect - the way they make us feel and react physically - fits together with their cognitive aspect - the way they present us with a particular view of the world. On the one hand, physical reactions and sensations may seem to have nothing to do with representing the world in a certain way; on the other, no way of representing the world may seem essentially to require such reactions and sensations. Yet, somehow, in emotion both are inextricably involved.

Sartre makes the connection by regarding emotional reactions as a substitute for purposive behaviour when the world is too "difficult" for that to be effective. But these "difficulties" are not grasped unemotionally and, as a consequence of this, reacted to non-rationally. Rather the difficulties in question are the emotive features of the world, not accessible otherwise than through reactions of the body whose capacities they challenge. While this last point is persuasive, however, Sartre's sharp distinction between rational purposive activity and emotional behaviour needs to be questioned.

Heidegger, who influenced Sartre in many other respects, does not draw this sharp distinction. Rather, Heidegger takes the view that purposive activity, as well as passionately emotional behaviour, is made possible only because our engagement with the world is pervaded by moods which come over us involuntarily. Moods reveal the features of the world in virtue of which what we do matters to us in the way it does. (Imaginary worlds if we employ the terminology of a previous chapter) That the world is a fearful place, for example, is what makes me cautious, and it is what makes it possible for me to be frightened by some specific thing in the world. None of this requires, and Sartre would concur in this, any prior desires, for safety say. For such desires are intelligible only given the way our moods reveal the world as mattering to us.

The lacuna in Heidegger's account is the role of bodily reactions and sensations in emotions. Arguably this gap can be filled by reference to considerations adduced by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva sees moods as bodily affects, operating in the realm of the "semiotic" - the pre-symbolic - since they lack determinate objects. But emotions directed at such objects, and hence affording cognition through symbols, must also involve similar physical reactions and sensations or else it would be unintelligible why the specific features in the world that they discern should matter to us in the way they do. For it is our bodies that register, normally or pathologically, the way the world matters to us, prior to any deliberation on our part as to how it should.

### 6 Reason, Agency and Understanding

In this chapter we attempt to replace an account of intentional engagement with the world in terms of the availability of practical reasoning, with an account anchored in 'understanding', in the Heideggerian sense. Intentional acts are bodily responses to a world experienced as making them appropriate. The rationality required of such acts is perspectival and available to those who can grasp how the world appears to subjects within it. Such perspectivity, however, does not make the rationality of our responses a *private* matter. Our modes of experiencing our world are ones into which we are socially and culturally initiated, in part by the moulding of our bodily responses. Consequently claims of rationality are subject to constraints of an implicit publicness.

The immanence of such an account of rationality raises issues of conservatism, difference and reflection. We suggest that such issues can be addressed employing resources from both hermeneutics and post structuralism. Gadamer's account of the fusion of horizons needs to be informed by Derrida's vigilance in respect of the otherness of the other and the pervasiveness of iterability. What emerges is a picture of subjects negotiating a shared world from differing positions within it.

## **7 Ourselves and Others**

This chapter identifies different moments in the formation of subjectivity and reveals how, at each of these moments, subjectivity is constitutively linked to inter-subjectivity. Our own selves are ontologically dependent on other selves, to whom we stand in particular relations. The moments, which are sometimes been discussed in developmental terms, capture aspects of selfhood, all of which remain in play in adult life. The identifications with others, the weaving of others into our bodily gestalt, the response to the look of others, the positioning of ourselves and others within language, and the recognition of radical difference, are aspects of our everyday living alongside others which makes our own formation as subjects possible.

## **8 Concluding Remarks**

The overall result of bringing the three elements of the title of this book into play in discussing the books topics is not *a theory*. It exemplifies a certain paradigm, though one with various theoretical presuppositions. The interest in this sort of approach, however, is the light which it casts on the topics discussed; the relationship of ourselves and our world and the understanding of ourselves and others. We hope, in a modest way, to further that understanding.

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# Subjectivity in Continental Philosophy of Mind

## A Commentary on *The World, the Flesh and the Subject* by Paul Gilbert & Kathleen Lennon

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Michael Dummett famously compared the relation between analytical philosophy and continental philosophy (or more specifically phenomenology) with the Rhine and the Danube – rivers that “rise quite close to one another and for a time pursue roughly parallel courses, only to diverge in utterly different directions and flow into different seas” (Dummett 1993: 26). The image is supposed to suggest the fruitlessness of attempting to establish contact between analytical philosophy and continental philosophy in their current shapes (there is a distance of 2,000 kilometres between the North Sea and the Black Sea). In Dummett’s view, “[w]e can re-establish communication only by going back to the point of divergence” (Dummett 1993: 193), that is, more concretely, by going back to the philosophies of Frege and Husserl. As Dummett points out, “[i]t’s no use now shouting across the gulf” (ibid.).

In *The World, the Flesh and the Subject*<sup>1</sup> Paul Gilbert and Kathleen Lennon make a significant contribution to the rapidly growing corpus of texts that reject or ignore Dummett’s claim and simply proceed to draw together and engage with thinkers from both sides of Dummett’s “gulf”. The book is an impressive achievement. In the course of some 150 pages, Gilbert and Lennon sketch a remarkable number of continental contributions to what is conventionally called the philosophy of mind: we encounter phenomenologists (such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Levinas), poststructuralists and “postmodernists” (such as Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard), feminists (such as de Beauvoir, Irigaray, Kristeva, and Butler), hermeneutic philosophers (Gadamer and, again, Heidegger), and psychoanalysts (Freud and Lacan). The thematic scope is equally impressive. The book contains lucid accounts of being-in-the-world, embodiment, self-other-relations, the structures of desire, emotions, and rationality, the significance of tradition and the possibility of understanding alien traditions, to mention but a few of the concepts and themes Gilbert and Lennon discuss. On top of this, Gilbert and Lennon do not merely present summaries of various philosophical arguments and positions; rather, throughout the book they also make it their business to provide brief, critical evaluations of the philosophical accounts they present. And finally, most of what Gilbert and Lennon write – including the distinct critical voice that runs through all of their discussions (of which more later) – has the rare virtue of being basically correct.

That said, however, any book that sets itself a task as comprehensive as this, and executes it in the course of less than 200 pages, is bound to give rise to critical questions. In what follows, I will sketch my, rather few, qualms.

First of all, one may wonder whether the book manages to provide “a clear and absorbing introduction to those new to the subject” (back cover, my emphasis). While, in general, Gilbert and

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1 Paul Gilbert and Kathleen Lennon 2005. All references are to this volume, unless otherwise indicated.

Lennon are remarkably successful in making philosophical perspectives that are often radically different address the same (or related) issues, the links and affinities are more conspicuous in some chapters than in others. I would thus expect the uninitiated to find chapter 3 pretty tough going. Placed just before chapters addressing desire and emotion, one would expect the chapter to discuss the faculty or power of imagination (something that phenomenologists, at least, have provided ample analyses of). But this reasonable expectation is disappointed. In fact the chapter takes its point of departure in some rather strange ideas of Lacan's in an attempt to provide an account of the way in which the world has cognitive and especially affective significance to us. The authors are clear that the "imaginary", as they use it, is "not, as in many theories of the imagination, to be contrasted with the real" (p. 46). But, apart from any special attachment to Lacan's conceptual apparatus – and Gilbert and Lennon distance themselves from Lacan's identification of the "imaginary self" with an "illusory self" (p. 51) – it is hard to see how talk of the imaginary can be anything but forced and confusing in this context. At the risk of sounding like a defender of ordinary language philosophy, I simply cannot see how the concepts of "imaginary worlds" and "imaginary bodies" (compare: "imaginary friend") can be helpful in conveying the important message Gilbert and Lennon want to convey.

Second, Gilbert and Lennon's account is radically opposed to Dummett's perspective in the sense that the former do not even mention the work of Edmund Husserl. ("Husserlian" occurs once, namely in a quotation from Levinas on p. 41, but Gilbert and Lennon do not comment on it or explain what it means.) Husserl was not only the founder of phenomenology, but in addition had a formative impact on many of the thinkers that are discussed extensively in *The World, the Flesh, and the Subject* (e.g., Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Derrida). I can think of only one fairly good reason for choosing not to say a single word about Husserl. This is the idea that it is controversial whether Husserl's philosophy would fit into the account of an embedded and embodied subjectivity that Gilbert and Lennon want to provide. If one wants neither to attract the wrath of Husserl-scholars by portraying the founder of phenomenology as a full-fledged Cartesian dualist, or a Berkeleyan subjective idealist, nor to challenge the interpretation of someone like Hubert Dreyfus, according to whom Husserl attempted "to ground all forms of intentionality in the meaning-giving activity of a detached transcendental subject" (Dreyfus 1991: 141),<sup>2</sup> then silence might seem the only workable option. The worry is understandable. But there are at least three reasons why it is not sufficient to justify the decision to leave Husserl unmentioned in a book such as the one I am reviewing here.

(1) Surely, similar controversies surround the interpretation of most if not all of the other philosophers discussed by Gilbert and Lennon. So if, say, the dispute concerning the status of the body in Heidegger's phenomenology doesn't prevent the authors from providing brief (and very competent) discussions of this topic (cf. pp. 8-14, 105-6), then why can't they do Husserl the same service?

(2) The restriction becomes almost absurd in Gilbert and Lennon's presentation of central themes from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. The idea, for example, that consciousness is not a matter of "I think" but of "I can" (p. 15) is taken directly from Husserl. The same goes for the point about my hand's ability to alternate between "touching" and "being touched" (pp. 18, 32). Merleau-Ponty does not attempt to hide the fact that he has taken these concepts and descriptions, as well as many other points about perception and embodiment, over from Husserl's manuscripts (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 92-3, 137), most of which have been published decades ago, and many of which are now available in English translation. So surely it would be unproblematic for Gilbert and Lennon to mention the fact. What is more, it might be very valuable – in particular to the uninitiated reader – to be made aware of the Husserlian ancestry of such essential thoughts on human embodied existence.

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<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, there really is no reason not to challenge Dreyfus' interpretation of Husserl. It is based on an extremely selective and biased reading. For alternatives to Dreyfus, see Zahavi 2003 and Overgaard 2004.

(3) This brings us to the most important reason why Husserl should not be left out of a book such as *The World, the Flesh and the Subject*. This is of course precisely the fact that he has extremely important things to say about subjectivity, embodiment, intersubjectivity, as well as many (though not all) of the other themes taken up in the book. In fact, there are a couple of places in the book where attention to Husserl could have helped to make the argument sharper and clearer.

For example, the discussion of Lyotard's thoughts on the "event" and the "indeterminacy of experience" could have benefited from a Husserlian input. The authors themselves complain that, "in using examples from art", Lyotard "does not entirely escape the danger" of seeming to base his arguments on "certain sorts of images of experience" (p. 37). But they also point to the mitigating circumstance that "at his best, Lyotard does connect the features of experience he wishes to stress to our bodily reactions, the different ways our eyes move and so on" (p. 37). The thing is that Husserl has probably worked more extensively than any other philosopher on precisely the question of the necessary "indeterminacy" of experience and its intimate connection to our bodily movements and reactions. And he has done so without relying on dubiously relevant examples from art. Using a concept that later became crucial in Gadamer's articulation of one of his most powerful ideas (cf. p. 133), Husserl points out how every experience (specifically perceptual experience) has an inner and an outer *horizon*. With "outer horizon" he wants to direct attention to the fact that every perceptual experience contains a reference to far more than the individual object or objects it focuses on. For example, the computer screen my gaze is fixed on right now presents itself to me as part of a wider reality that encompasses not merely this office, but ultimately an unlimited, vaguely present horizon of undetermined reality (cf. Husserl 1976, p. 57). But, according to Husserl, even the object I focus on is shot through with indeterminacy. Not only is there more to the computer than the side or aspect it presents to me right now (there is a backside, an inner filled with microchips, etc., all of which is vaguely anticipated by me right now, but not really presented to me). In addition, the side that is turned towards me contains its own horizons. If I would move closer, I would be able to discern microscopic grids, scratches, and so forth, of which I am now at most dimly aware. All of these horizons, according to Husserl, are necessary elements of experience. Without them there would be no world and no objects for me to perceive. What is more, Husserl argues in detail that the experiential horizons are intimately connected with the experiencing subject's potential for bodily movement (see Husserl 1966, pp. 3-15 for a brief overview of Husserl's argument).

To return to a point I touched on before, I think the argument of chapter 3 could also be made considerably more lucid using the "conceptual resource" of "life-world" rather than "imaginary world" (and "lived body" rather than "imaginary body"). As is well known, "life-world" was the later Husserl's favorite term for the world considered the way it presents itself as (affectively, cognitively, practically, and so forth) significant to our lives. It seems much better suited to convey the message of the chapter than is "imaginary world"; and it is a concept that does not swim against the current of ordinary language use.

However, all of these remarks are really just suggestions for minor improvements on a text that, as already noted, competently works through an enormous chunk of twentieth century continental thought. There is one rather more substantial criticism that I suspect could be brought to bear on the book. I am reluctant to raise the objection, since it concerns a central thought of Gilbert and Lennon's that I think is simply correct. But let me, for the remainder of this review, play the devil's advocate.

The thought is stated at various places in the book, especially in the authors' critical comments on some of the philosophers they discuss. In the chapter on desire, for example, Foucault, Butler, and Deleuze are all criticized on account of their failure to provide "an account of subjectivity in terms of the point of view of a subject on to the world" (p. 80, cf. p. 83). In chapter 6, the classical (instrumentalist) account of rationality is faulted for "fail[ing] to capture the experience of rationality from the point of view of the subject", providing us only "with the observer's relation to an act", not the agent's relation to it (p. 117). And in the final chapter (addressing questions

concerning intersubjectivity), Gilbert and Lennon criticize Lacan and Derrida for “hav[ing] lost the phenomenological account of a subjectivity as a perspective onto a world” (p. 151). What Gilbert and Lennon insist on throughout the book, in other words, and what separates them sharply from especially some of the poststructuralist writers they discuss, is the appropriateness and necessity of the concept of *subjectivity*. Subjectivity is not a fiction, or a mere byproduct of the play of signs, or whatever else some continental thinkers have been led to claim. The crucial significance of embodiment as well as social, cultural-linguistic, and historical embeddedness should not, according to Gilbert and Lennon, be allowed to blur the fact that each of us still has (or is) an embodied and embedded *perspective on the world*. It is in terms of this perspective or point of view on the world that the world matters to us, presents itself as meaningful, as affording possibilities for meaningful action, and so forth.

Gilbert and Lennon are, in my view, perfectly right to insist on a robust notion of subjectivity. But, in the eyes of many philosophers – not only philosophers swimming in the continental stream, but numerous “analytical” thinkers as well – such a robust notion should be viewed with suspicion. The reasons for resisting to adopt a strong notion of subjectivity are of course many; but very often the resistance boils down to some version of the claim that a robust notion of subjectivity carries too much Cartesian and/or transcendental baggage. Gilbert and Lennon portray Judith Butler, for example, as advocating this view. She, “along with other poststructuralist writers, has no room for the concept of experience, which for her suggests a domain of the inner, hidden from public view, serving to constitute the subject, and act as a guarantor to meaning and a foundation to knowledge” (p. 127). The concepts of experience and subjectivity have no such implication for the authors of *The World, the Flesh and the Subject*; throughout the book they argue persuasively that one can retain a substantive notion of subjectivity as an experiential point of view on the world, and still reject transcendental delusions of grandeur as well as Cartesian inner worlds. The key, as they indicate in the introduction, is to adopt a “naturalistic” conception of the subject as placed “in the world as the center of an embodied perspective on it” (p. 3).<sup>3</sup>

I wonder, however, whether Gilbert and Lennon make a convincing case for the idea that we *need* to make room for such a notion of subjectivity. After all, Butler, Foucault, Lacan, and many others apparently think they can do perfectly well without it. Thus, if Gilbert and Lennon want (as they evidently do) to criticize such philosophers for not making room for an account of subjectivity as a perspective on the world, then they have to provide an argument showing that one cannot do without such an account.

- Let me try to illustrate the problem. The authors quote with approval Simon Glendinning’s (allegedly Wittgensteinian) statements that:

the behavior of a living thing is not a *scene* as of, say, ‘a subject experiencing pain’, except in its structural relation to a reading-response – even if the ‘subject’ is, in fact, isolated, and even if it is, in fact, ‘oneself’ who is in pain. (Glendinning 1998: 147)

Gilbert and Lennon comment:

The range of such responses yields the contours of the pain itself, but they only do so if they are responses of bodies whose own expressions could be given meaning in the same way. The recognition of behavior as pain requires creatures with a certain range of responses. (p. 152)

For Glendinning, however, the lesson to learn from this is that we should ultimately discard the concept of subjectivity altogether. He thinks we can do fine with the concepts of behavior and “reading-response” alone, and he rejects as fictitious all attempts “to thicken mere behavior by

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<sup>3</sup> “Naturalistic”, as Gilbert and Lennon use the term, does not refer specifically to reductionist or eliminativist outlooks. Rather, an account is naturalistic in the intended sense if it avoids reference to (supernatural) “mysterious spiritual substances” (p. 3).

reference to the presence ‘in’ or ‘behind’ it of a self-present subject” (Glendinning 1998: 10, 150).<sup>4</sup> Why can’t Gilbert and Lennon make do with their notions of bodies that express themselves, and respond to the expressions of other bodies? Why attempt to “thicken” their account of bodily behavior by reference to a subject with a first-person perspective on things?

To a certain extent, Gilbert and Lennon have anticipated and preempted this type of criticism. They state in their introduction that their argument for the centrality of the notion of a “perspective on the world” ultimately relies on nothing more than “a claim for its superior fecundity in elucidating [key psychological] concepts” (p. 3). And admittedly, there are places where they do a good job of showing the superior fecundity of their position. For example, when they charge the traditional account of rationality with being “impersonal”, they convincingly point out that “it is grasp of the situation from the agent’s point of view that we need to have if we are to understand [an] action, and not simply see it as an instance of regularity, causal or otherwise” (p. 117). At other times, however, they seem simply to insist on their view as phenomenologically evident (e.g., pp. 83, 151). This is problematic for the reason that many of the philosophers Gilbert and Lennon are arguing against would *ab initio* be suspicious of talk of “phenomenology” – suspecting it to harbor precisely the kind of Cartesianism and/or transcendentalism that they are out to exorcize. I also think some of these philosophers would be prepared to accept the inferior fecundity of their perspective in certain restricted contexts as a fair price to pay for their radical break with the Cartesian tradition.

All in all, then, I wonder whether Gilbert and Lennon are able to make their insistence on a robust notion of subjectivity appear sufficiently superior to convince anyone who is not already (like me) a believer. And since they want to fault other writers for not “thickening” their accounts with such a robust notion, this is not satisfactory. Gilbert and Lennon owe us a slightly more elaborate account of the superior virtues of their perspective. One place where I think they could have done more to defend their central thesis is in the final chapter, “Ourselves and Others”. Referring, *inter alia*, to Heidegger’s account of the everyday self as the “they-self”, Gilbert and Lennon remark: “Central as such accounts are in resisting a picture of a subject whose experiences are formed in isolation [...], they are in danger of reducing the psyche to the social. We also need an account of *individual* subjectivities” (p. 140). I completely agree. But it could be added that the danger in question is not to be taken lightly; and in fact a little more elaboration on this point could have made an extremely valuable contribution to showing just how necessary an account of individual subjectivity is. For as continental thinkers such as Husserl and Levinas have argued in detail, the price of downplaying, ignoring, or rejecting individual perspectives on the world is ultimately to make sociality incomprehensible. Our individual viewpoints are crucial to our being different subjects. And we must be different subjects if the notion of community is to make sense. A community of *no one* is not a *community*. Without subjectivity there is no *intersubjectivity*. Gilbert and Lennon’s minimal “individualism” is thus not only *compatible with*, but in fact a *necessary condition for*, a coherent account of sociality.

The attentive reader will have noticed that my critical remarks almost exclusively concern what Gilbert and Lennon have *not* written; I have barely offered a single criticism of what they *have* written. This is no coincidence. Apart from the occasional (or rather extremely rare) misprint,<sup>5</sup> there is really not much to point one’s finger at in this book. It is well written, engaging, and philosophically competent all the way through. Such books are difficult to criticize.

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4 He thus accuses McDowell for propounding a residually Cartesian conception in allowing for a subjectivity that has a “potential for a distinctively first-personal, ‘inside take’ on its own states, its presence to its own experiences” (Glendinning 1998: 139). A very different interpretation of Wittgenstein’s thoughts about bodily expression (of for example pain) is found in Overgaard 2005.

5 Just to substantiate my claim that there *are* typos let me mention one that jumped at me: On p. 146, Sartre is said to be the author of *Being and Time* rather than *Being and Nothingness*. (I also couldn’t help notice that the index lists “Wood, Donald” instead of “Wood, David”.)

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# **The Phenomenological Content from an Ontological and Epistemological Point of View**

## ***A Commentary on The World, the Flesh and the Subject by Paul Gilbert & Kathleen Lennon***

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### **1 Introduction**

Paul Gilbert's and Kathleen Lennon's book is characterised by two central features. Firstly, it assumes a radically anti-reductionist position in the field of contemporary philosophy of mind. In particular, Gilbert and Lennon explicitly reject the dominant functionalist paradigm. The predominance of this model is connected to the widespread acceptance of the scientific image of the world (for example that supplied by empirical psychology, neurophysiology and computer science) in explicit contrast to the so called manifested image of the world. Contrary to this, the authors defend the privilege of the manifest image by showing the extremely sophisticated character of the various types of experience that this image implies. The descriptive analyses of imagination, desire, emotions, comprehension and the distinction between us and others, should be considered from this perspective.

The second distinctive feature of this volume is that it investigates issues debated in recent analytic philosophy of mind by taking inspiration from arguments notably offered in a certain type of Continental tradition. In particular, Gilbert and Lennon contrast the myth of the given with the structure and the complexity of the experience, intentionality with the passivity of sensibility, and the activity of the mental with the passivity of being in the world and of living in a body.

In this essay, I aim to show firstly that these topics are present and subtly analysed in the Husserlian phenomenological tradition. My second aim is to argue that taking into consideration Husserl's analyses, more than Heidegger's, Merleau Ponty's and Sartre's, allows us to access not only specific theoretical accounts, but, above all, a general epistemological perspective that is completely alternative and non-the-less as powerful as the one used in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind.

### **2 The problem of Consciousness and the Myth of the Given**

What are the relationships between body and mind? Can the brain generate consciousness? Do mental phenomena have causal powers as physical phenomena do? Where is the mind in the natural order? Is it possible to reduce consciousness to basic elements that are not conscious? These are some of the fundamental questions in philosophy of mind, questions that are the object of Paul Gilbert's and Kathleen Lennon's book.

Wilfrid Sellars has suggested that in our contemporary culture there is a contrast between two 'ideal types': the *manifest image* and the *scientific image* of the man-in-the-world; he has also

suggested that this contrast could possibly turn into a real clash.

The manifest image constitutes the attempt to simply represent the world as it usually appears to every human subject. On the other hand, the scientific image is characterized by the modern attempt of physical-mathematical theories to give us causal explanations of the structure of the real world.<sup>1</sup>

Eddington's description of the "double" table offers a famous illustration of the opposition of these two images<sup>2</sup>: on the one hand, the table that is familiar from the childhood, the coloured table, extended, solid; on the other hand, the table described physically is almost an empty space (where the total mass is a minuscule fraction of the total mass of the table) in which electric charges travel at enormous speeds.

In philosophy of mind the clash between the manifest image and the scientific image of the *man-in-the-world* or between usual experience and experimental results is based on the central notion of consciousness. This opposition involves two aspects: the existence of interior qualitative and subjective contents and the privileged and immediate access to these contents: the sensation of quality of green is *my* sensation; the perception of harmony of that melody is *my* perception; the joy of the clarity of that spring day is *my* joy.

Consciousness is, for Chalmers, a mystery, and a problem.<sup>3</sup> Why is consciousness a problem? There are important philosophical traditions, such as Husserl's phenomenology and Bergson's intuitionism, for which the consciousness does not constitute a problem at all. The fact that often, in contemporary philosophy of mind, talks about *the problem* of consciousness involve a heavy use, in conceptual analysis, of the notion of reduction. Consciousness constitutes a problem, therefore, because with difficulty it can be reduced to something which is no longer consciousness.

The element which «opposes resistance» is the subjective and qualitative elements of the states of consciousness: the *qualia*. The notions of mind and of consciousness seem therefore compromised with not exactly scientific elements: privacy, immediacy, subjectivity.

*The problem of consciousness* seems to be composed of two distinct problems: a) the problem of the relationship between subjective and objective data; b) the problem of the possibility of knowledge of the subjective.

The first problem is an ontological one: it concerns the individuation of those properties that characterize the states of consciousness and their reducibility or non reducibility to objective data. The second problem is an epistemological one: more than the characterisation of states of consciousness, it concerns their effective knowledge. Both problems, ontological and epistemological, are based on a common notion: the notion of reduction.

### **3 The Epistemological Problem: the Content of Consciousness**

The best exemplification of the epistemological problem of consciousness seems to be offered by the philosophical relationship between Husserl and Schlick.

A crucial question for Schlick, as well as for logical empiricism in general, is the total insignificance of the concept of content (in particular intuitive content) for both a theory and practice of knowledge. Besides, it is this thesis (related to a notable distinction between *kennen* and *erkennen*) that marks – on Schlick's explicit admission – his radical detachment with respect to Husserl's phenomenology.

Why is the concept of content unimportant for a theory of adequate and, above all, scientifically informed knowledge? Schlick's answer is as follows: it is because the content is inexpressible and indescribable – that is, linguistically untouchable. "The difference between structure and material, between form and content is, roughly speaking, the difference between that which can be expressed and that which cannot be expressed".<sup>4</sup> Let us consider the famous example of the born blind person.

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1 Sellars 1997 and 1963.

2 Eddington 1929, see in particular pp. 9-12.

3 Chalmers 1996.

4 Schlick 1925-1936: 291.

Let us consider the perception of green and look at the ineffable quality of greenness, which make the essence of its content. This quality is accessible only to beings endowed with eyesight and power of colour perception. It could not possibly be conveyed to a person who is born blind. Shall we conclude, Schlick asks, that such a person could not understand any of our statements about the colour, that they must be quite meaningless to him because he can never possess the content of green? Schlick offers a negative answer to this question. We can communicate to the born blind person, as we can to a sighted person, the meaning of “green”. Nevertheless, what we communicate is not the content – the greenness: «Since content is essentially incommunicable by language, it cannot be conveyed to a seeing man any more or any better than to a blind one». <sup>5</sup> What can be communicated (or expressed, which is for Schlick the same) is the fact that something exists that we call green, and it is something possessing a certain structure or belonging to a certain system of internal relations.

I can give a particular description of this green leaf lying on my desk by placing the colour in a certain order. I assert, for instance, that it is a bright green, or a rich green, or a bluish green, trying to describe the green by comparing it to other colours. Evidently it belongs to the intrinsic nature of our green that it occupies a definite position in a range of colours and in a scale of brightness, and this position is determined by relation of similarity and dissimilarity to the other elements – in this case shades – of the whole system.

In this sense every quality has a certain definite logical structure: «in this way every quality (for instance, the qualities of sensation: sound, smell, heat, etc., as well as colour) is interconnected with all others by internal relations which determine its place in the system of qualities». In such a perspective the difference between a colour-blind person and a sighted one is a purely formal property. There is a greater variety in the perception of a sighted individual, or, what is the same, the system of colour is more complicated in a sighted person than in a blind one. The internal relations are not as simple, and this is a difference of structure. The situation described by Schlick can be represented as follow:

<i>The green of this leaf</i>	
<i>Blind from birth</i>	<i>Sighted</i>
<i>Not living, not enjoying the content</i> <i>Not knowing the content</i> <i>Knowing the structure of the green</i>	<i>Living, enjoying the content</i> <i>Not knowing the content</i> <i>Knowing the structure of the green</i>

In *The Idea of Phenomenology* Husserl’s example is perfectly analogous to Schlick’s with respect to a person born deaf. A person born deaf knows that sounds exist and sounds make harmonies. But he cannot understand how sounds do this, how musical operas are possible. He cannot represent a thing of that kind, he cannot look at it, and looking at it he cannot understand *the how*. No kind of physical or psychological theory about colour can add anything to this «pure vision», which, according to Husserl, establishes the sense of colour. <sup>6</sup>

In conclusion: for Schlick the content coincides with the inexpressible; consequently, it is necessarily outside an authentic cognitive ambit; for Husserl, on the other hand, experiences are essential parts of knowledge. However, the rigorous separation between Schlick and Husserl can be analysed further. The problem, I think, is to establish what we mean by content and intuition, two concepts that have a more complex structure than Schlick has supposed. Schlick often speaks, with polemical reference about phenomenology, of perception of content: «I can perceive a green leaf; I

<sup>5</sup> Schlick 1926-1936: 295.

<sup>6</sup> Husserl 1966.

say that I perceive it if (among other things) the content ‘green’ is there, but it would be nonsense to say that I perceive this content». <sup>7</sup>

The content – in the sense of intuitive content – is simply there. If we insist on using a verb, the word ‘enjoying’ would present itself: it is the nearest equivalent to the German *erleben*<sup>8</sup>. «Here we uncover the great error committed by the philosophy of intuition: the confusing of acquaintance (*kennen*) with knowledge (*erkennen*)». <sup>9</sup> Nevertheless the concept of living or experiencing does not exhaust the concept of phenomenological intuition. In fact, in *Logical Investigations*, Husserl continuously repeats the distinction between experiencing (*erleben*) the content and apprehending (*auffassen*) or perceiving a property or an object.<sup>10</sup> In the first case we refer to experience of immanent contents. In the second case, we refer to perception (or imagination) of a transcendent object. We experience (or enjoy, as Schlick says) acoustic sensations but we hear (we perceive) the singer’s song. One of Husserl’s fundamental criticisms, addressed to his teacher Brentano, is the fact that he did not distinguish adequately between simply having contents and the apprehension of those contents. It is ambiguous to talk about sense data. Sensation and sensory property (or quality) are two rigorously distinct concepts: sensation is immanent content, while property and, in general, object, are transcendent. The same form can present itself from different perspectives, the same colour with different illuminations, the same sound can be perceived as now near or now far away. So, contrary to what Schlick says — «when I gaze at a red surface, the red is part of the content of my consciousness»<sup>11</sup> — red is not a part of the content of my consciousness. It is this thesis that allows Husserl to exceed the phenomenal notion of consciousness (for example that of classic empiricism and in particular that of David Hume). In such a theory consciousness is a place, and the objects that we would call intentional are not the things meant through immanent data, but the immanent data in themselves, that is, sensations, ideas, perceptions, images and so on. On the contrary, for Husserl consciousness is not a closed place and the object is nothing which is inside a consciousness, as in a sack, almost as if consciousness were an empty form which is the same everywhere, an empty sack which is always identical, in which we put at one time this and at another time that.

Yet there are two crucial differences between the two perspectives. First: Schlick declares explicitly that «intuition and conceptual knowledge do not both strive for the same goal, they move in opposite directions»<sup>12</sup>. In the Husserlian perspective, in contrast, intuition (perception or imagination) is an essential part in the process of knowledge. It is the fusion of two elements: one is purely structural or formal and the other intuitive. Generally speaking, authentic knowledge cannot do without a qualitative factor (which in modern philosophy of the mind falls under the term *qualia*). Even if the identification with a sensation of red is not a sufficient condition for the determination of an intuitive act, it is in any case a necessary condition: because we have an identification of a red object we have to experience “what it is like” (using one of Nagel’s expressions <sup>13</sup>) to see something red. We have knowledge when we operate or work on the basis of recognition. But recognition necessarily implies an act of intuition, that is, an act of perception or imagination. On the contrary for Schlick (it is not just by chance that this thesis has been silently resumed by many contemporary materialists, like Churchland, for example<sup>14</sup>) the qualitative element is irreducibly outside of an adequate theory of knowledge. When I look at the blue sky and lose myself entirely in the contemplation of it without thinking, then I am enjoying the blue, I am in a state of pure intuition. The blue fills my mind completely. But that does not mean knowing what

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7 Schlick 1918: 319.

8 «Intuition is enjoyment, enjoyment is life, not knowledge» (Schlick 1926-1936: 323).

9 Schlick 1918: 83.

10 Husserl 1899-1900: §14.

11 Schlick 1918: 102.

12 Schlick 1918: 82.

13 Nagel 1974.

14 Churchland 1985 and 1989.

blue really is. The meaning of the word “blue” is entirely included in the structure of the intuitive content. So the inexpressibility of the blue does not operate effectively in the comprehension, or in the knowledge of the blue.

Second: affirming that content is simply there and simply present means supporting a simplistic and undifferentiated vision of the concept of intuition. We experience contents, but we mean objects that go beyond these contents. For example, Husserl distinguishes sensation from perception on the one hand, and perception from conceptual elaboration on the other. Perception, for Husserl, is not a judgement. It is not, in itself, knowledge of the object. This distinction marks the important difference between an epistemic conception and a non-epistemic conception of perception. Husserl accepts the second type of conception. What exactly makes this agreement important is that it can be used to correct Kant’s famous principle according to which «intuition without conception is blind, and conception without intuition is empty». While the second part of the affirmation is without doubt true, the first needs a correction: it is not the concept that allows intuition to see. Perception has already, in itself, an organization, a structure which does not have any reference to conceptualization.

What is experience for Schlick? Which role does such an experience play in our knowledge of the world that surrounds us? I believe that the real element of the deep disagreement between Schlick and Husserl lies: 1) in a different philosophical conception of the notion of experience; 2) in the different philosophical (and not only programmatic) value that the two authors attribute to the concept of experience with reference to a general theory of knowledge.

With reference to the first question we have now seen that Schlick has the tendency to furnish an undifferentiated and extreme report on the concept of intuition. He speaks almost always about intuition as «an exceptionally close relation between subject and object»<sup>15</sup>. The border-line case of this is the mystic relation between conscience and God. In reality this is a caricature of the concept of intuition. To begin with, we have seen that intuition has an internal structure. Schlick says:

In knowing there are always two terms: something that is known and that as which it is known. In the case of intuition, on the other hand, we do not put two objects into relation with one another, we confront just one object, the one intuited. Thus an essentially different process is involved; intuition has no similarity whatever to cognition. When I give myself fully to an intuitive content of my consciousness, say a red patch I see before me, or when in behaving I submerge myself fully in the feeling of activity, I experience through intuition the red or the activity. But have I really come to know the essence of the red or of the activity? Not at all. (Schlick 1918: 82)

This is an oversimplified conception of intuition. In intuition there is also a clear distinction between *what* we perceive and *how* we perceive it. In the case of perception *the how* corresponds to a determined perspective. The object of perception is, by its very essence, something that never reveals itself entirely to us, but only reveals itself in partial appearances. So intuition doesn’t mean to give myself fully to an intuitive content of my consciousness, say a red patch I see before me, but to perceive (or to imagine) an object in certain completely objective ways.

Now we go on to the second question: what role does experience have in the process of knowledge? Experience is an essentially and radically private and subjective act. In this sense experience (or better the intrinsically qualitative element which distinguishes it), as crucial as it is, is outside the circle of our assertions and, then, outside knowledge. For Husserl, in contrast, experience is an integral part of knowledge. Without it no determinate knowledge is possible.

For Schlick «to know is to recognise (*wiedererkennen*) or rediscover (*wiederfinden*)».<sup>16</sup> Recognise and rediscover what? Which are the things that are confronted in a cognitive process? In every day life we refer to representations. But representations for Schlick are «quite vague and

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<sup>15</sup> Schlick 1918: 81.

<sup>16</sup> Schlick 1918: 15.

blurred». <sup>17</sup> Schlick rejects the fluctuating, indeterminate, transient character of the intuitive configurations to the determination of concepts, leading from the qualitative analysis to the quantitative analysis <sup>18</sup>.

For Husserl, on the other hand, intuition has a proper structure, different from conceptual structure.

This problem is a Kantian problem (present for example in McDowell as Gilbert and Lennon also show). In conclusion, according to Schlick, the intuitive and qualitative content is in principle not knowing because it's inexplicable and incommunicable. According to Husserl, on the other hand, determined knowledge without intuition, does not exist; therefore, without intervention of qualitative elements.

The problem now is: what is the structure of qualitative states? What is the nature of the intuited objects? These are not epistemological but ontological questions.

#### **4 The Ontological Problem: the Nature of Consciousness and Qualia**

The relation between brain and *qualia*, as David Chalmers said, is the *hard problem* of the philosophy of mind. <sup>19</sup> But he is not alone. William James, for example, says that «when I say every “state” or “thought” is part of a personal consciousness, “personal consciousness” is one of the terms in question. Its meaning we know so long as no one asks to define it, but to give an accurate account of it is the most difficult of philosophic task». <sup>20</sup>

The problem of the definition of “personal consciousness” is the problem of the ontological status of *qualia*: «when friends and foes of *qualia* disagree whether *qualia* exist, are they really talking about the same thing? The ontologically rather ordinary fact that phenomenal properties of an experience exist only insofar as they belong to someone's experience [...] when combined with the epistemologically rather extraordinary fact that experience cannot epistemically be shared, and hence everyone can have “direct access” to only his or her *qualia*, seems to make it uniquely, even surprisingly difficult to investigate the ontological nature of *qualia*. As such, it gives rise to a wide variety of positions regarding what *qualia* are ». <sup>21</sup>

The presupposed ontological reductionist model and functionalist model speaks about states of consciousness as independent and determined, and because of this quantifiable and analysable from an objective perspective.

In reality it doesn't seem to be like this for the following reasons:

- a) states of consciousness are *essentially* and *intrinsically* qualitative;
- b) states of consciousness depend *essentially* and *intrinsically* on a point of view;
- c) states of consciousness are not isolated but depend *essentially* and *intrinsically* on the context; which impedes finding characteristic ontological properties which are fixed and independent;
- d) just because they are qualitative, states of consciousness are *essentially* and *intrinsically* non mathematic and non quantifiable.

The first two arguments in recent times take up a large space in the philosophy of mind in so far as they constitute the basis of anti- reductionism. The third argument, less exploited, finds nevertheless more agreement in recent literature, as the text of Paul Gilbert and Kathleen Lennon

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<sup>17</sup> Schlick 1918: 17.

<sup>18</sup> "The kind of knowledge that meets the needs of pre-scientific thought and practical life cannot find legitimate employment in a science that demands at all times the greatest possible rigor and the highest degree of certitude [...] What is a concept? A concept is to be distinguished from an intuitive image above all by the fact that it is completely determined and has nothing uncertain about it. (...) Thus a concept is not an image. It is not a real mental structure of any sort. Indeed it is not real at all, but imaginary—something that we assume in place of images with strictly determined content". (Schlick 1918: 19-20)

<sup>19</sup> Chalmers 1996.

<sup>20</sup> James 1997: 72.

<sup>21</sup> Güzeldere 1995: 39.

clearly shows. It deals with a subject of clear Husserlian matrix, present in a line of thought that, starting from Heidegger, Merleau Ponty and Sartre, considers the fundamental role of the body in the constitution of objects.

The fourth argument, that is completely from an Husserlian origin, seems not to have been used in the philosophy of mind.

According to the first two arguments, the states of consciousness are constrained by a perspective and exactly because of this they are intrinsically subjective. Furthermore, living in a state of consciousness «has a certain effect», this renders consciousness intrinsically qualitative.

In this way, a reaction to a stimulus is not yet a sensation (of hunger, of pain, of colour), exactly like reacting to something red (as is found in photographic film) is not yet perceiving red.

The qualitative and subjective characters seem to be non-eliminable.

A possible objection to reductionism could be the following: an adequate neurobiological description of mental states should produce an exact explanation of them, in particular an explanation why it «has a certain effect» on certain physical states perceiving the objects in a certain way, therefore having certain qualitative states.

From this point of view, reductionism in the philosophy of mind should not and cannot allow us to know what it's like to be someone else, in order to be somebody else we would have to share their physical realization, that is impossible.

If therefore the theory does not succeed, it should not be considered as a defect of the theory.

In fact, all that the theory can do is to explain why a certain system has the capacity to feel what it is like to be that system. Nevertheless the problem of *how* the quality of pain, for example, can emerge from a brain activity is still philosophically unsolved, perhaps unsolvable.

Moreover, from the phenomenological point of view, the epistemological and objective survey (on the third person perspective) is theoretically subordinate to the psychological and subjective survey (on the first person perspective), as Gilbert e Lennon admit:

«it is that the 'psychological' and 'epistemological' questions, treated separately in analytic philosophy, may be considered together within the Continental tradition (...) And these questions can be answered together because from the point of view of the agent is the way the world is that is of cardinal importance, so that what it is like for her to experience it as she does needs to be understood in terms of the way this reveals the world as being» (p.5).

According to the third argument the states of consciousness are rooted in the body, in the double sense that their subsistence is anchored in one body and in the sense that their subsistence I constrained by an entire body: the union of body and quality is what we call existence. In this sense, the *qualia* are part of the entry of man in the world, of this project in the world; they are the distinctive sign of being in the world [*Dasein*, literally 'being there']. One of the fundamental objections to the project of Artificial Intelligence consists of showing how the machine is structurally unable to be in the world.

Cognition operates on the system that has a body and not on the formal abstract system. The cognitive activity, intended as an activity of comprehension of the world, is a capacity of intuitive comprehension, preliminary and tacit for many aspects (this would also explain, for example, the incapacity of even an extremely sophisticated calculator to simulate normal good sense). The theme of body (which is the basis of the Heideggerian concept of «to have things ready to hand») is one of the fundamental themes in Husserl's phenomenology. In particular, the distinction between *Körper* and *Leibkörper* underline the crucial distinction between an objective way of treating the body (the body intended as an object amongst the others, treated together with its organs as fragment of matter) and a subjective, pre-reflexive way of treating the body. The analysis of the body, moreover, is closely linked in Husserl's phenomenology to the essentially perspectival character of perception. Things are viewed only in profile and, at the same time, perceived in their unity and identity. The vision of things is anchored to our own body and to the position in space. It's the body that constitutes our point of view of the world. If I consider the proper body and the feeling body

I'm not *in front of* my body, but *I am* my body, a unity in which all the components are involved in a « unique drama».

This deep ambiguity of the notion of body allows us to overcome the traditional distinction between subject and object intended as entities which are one in front of the other. But it also allow us to overcome the rigid separation between consciousness and matter present in the Cartesian dualism, therefore refuting «the Cartesian-inspired picture of human beings as subjects of experience somehow linked to physical organism but also from his account of the way being in the world is not a spatial relation, in the ordinary sense» (p.13).

Finally, declaring the importance of the analysis of the body in the philosophy of the mind, means to base philosophical research on a radically anti-reductionist perspective.

As Gilbert e Lennon illustrate, «psychological phenomena are intimately related to the body. In this work philosophy of mind and philosophy of body are intertwined. The body as it is conceived here, however, is not that presented to us by physical science, but the body as it is encountered in ordinary life.» (p. 3).

In the fourth argument, developed by Husserl in the *Crisis of European Sciences*<sup>22</sup>, the *plena* (those which in the philosophy of mind are the *qualia*) live in the dimension of *the more or less*. But they are not intended as undetermined entities because, on the contrary, they are perfectly determined entities. They are essentially non measurable and non quantifiable entities.

The *plenum* is, in phenomenology, one of the essential component of material ontology: sounds, colours, tactile and smelt qualities, those that traditionally are identified with secondary qualities and in philosophy of mind are known as *qualia*.

A direct quantitative and mathematical treatment of *plena* is impossible because the *plena*, by their very nature, cannot be idealized. In this sense, it is possible to say that qualitative and phenomenal entities are inexact, morphological, fluctuating and gradual invariances and non limited forms in the sense of geometry and mathematics.

Only in the case of space graduality can have a major or minor perfection and it is precisely this major or minor perfection that we call ideal. The essential unmeasurability of *qualia* is a crucial element. The problem of the reduction of mental to something that is no longer mental can in fact be linked, from this point of view, to the problem of the reduction of that which is not measurable to that which is measurable. A strategy that, as we have seen, is profoundly anti-intuitive.

### 3 Conclusions

The problem if the states of consciousness being reducible to quantitative data has until now had essentially four solutions. According to the first solution, consciousness (and the qualitative states of which it is composed) is entirely reducible. This solution involves both the materialist theory of identity between mental states and cerebral states proposed by Place, Armstrong and Smart and the so called eliminativism of the mental states in favour of the neuronal and cerebral states proposed by Churchland.

According to the second solution, consciousness is logically non-reducible to the scientific vision of the world. This is the solution exemplified by the so called dualism of substance.

The third solution, the so called “mysterian”, maintains that the problem of possible reduction of consciousness is in principle unfathomable. How «soft grey matter» can produce the inexorable qualitative variety of our mental and representational life, is a mystery destined to remain inexplicable by its own nature.<sup>23</sup>

The fourth solution maintains the problem of consciousness and its place in the scientific image of the world is resolved only if the basis of reduction is amplified until even the qualitative and phenomenal elements are included. Nevertheless this means admitting the total irreducibility and

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22 Husserl 1936.

23 Mc Ginn 1989.

ineliminability of *qualia*.

The solution that we have proposed has nothing in common with any of the four solutions indicated above. The reason lies in the fact that the analysis of consciousness is no longer identified in terms of a reduction. We have analysed this solution from two distinct points of view: the epistemological point of view and the ontological point of view. From an epistemological perspective the phenomenological approach is anti-reductionist because it declares on one hand the absolute priority of the qualitative data and, on the other, the necessity of intuition so that one can speak of consciousness of determined objects.

Every intention, in the technical sense of phenomenology, has a *motivational link* with an initial and original appearance which is qualitative. Every object, even if theoretical and abstract, will have a motivational link with an intuitive object, that is immediately and qualitatively given. It is in these terms, rather than the terms of reduction, that for example the relationship between a phenomenal thing and the physical thing should be interpreted, and therefore the relationship between manifest image and scientific image.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the abstract and symbolic entities should be excluded from the theory of consciousness. It is in fact wrong to consider the world of the so called primary qualities (the objective, measurable, quantifiable qualities) as the only real world and to consider the secondary qualities (the subjective, phenomenal, intuitive qualities) as mere epiphenomena. But it is also wrong to consider the world of secondary qualities as a unique real world and to reduce the sphere of physical determinations to pure hypotheses without foundation.

Phenomenal or intuitive determinations and categorical or theoretical determinations are distinguishable only in so far as they correspond to different types of intentions.

The priority of intuition, together with the priority given to qualitative determinations, is a priority that no longer has anything therefore to do with the reduction mechanism that constitutes the pivot on which the entire contemporary philosophy of mind is based.

The priority of intuition in phenomenology is in fact a substantially genetic priority which opens the way to the passive consciousness of Merleau Ponty, according to which «intentionality is in the first place, therefore, the ‘motor intentionality’ of my body acting, as it were, autonomously upon objects» (p.23).

From an ontological perspective, the phenomenological approach is anti-reductionist for the following reason: the essentially qualitative nature of states of consciousness; their dependence on a perspective; their bodily nature; the impossibility of their mathematical description and quantification.

There are four arguments all present in Husserlian texts that have had different development in the post-Husserlian phenomenological tradition, from Heidegger to Merleau Ponty, from Sartre until the anti-reductionism in the philosophy of the mind.

Gilbert's and Lennon's book, which is rooted in this line of research, has the benefit of offering arguments in favour of an «alternative paradigm» (the phenomenological and hermeneutic paradigm). The theoretical consequences of this paradigm have not yet been sufficiently considered and exploited in the recent philosophy of mind. Moreover what is worth investigating further, both from theoretical point of view and historical point of view, are Husserl's subtle and sophisticated analyses: the distinction between intentional and representational content of experience and sensational or phenomenal content of experience; the *plena* (which constitutes the phenomenological version of *qualia*); the notion of *Erlebnis* with its rooting in the body and, finally, the largely passive and genetic character of consciousness. These analyses offer a firm philosophical background and many valid arguments for anti-reductionism in philosophy of mind.

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# The Nature and Content of Experience

## A Commentary on *The World, the Flesh and the Subject* by Paul Gilbert & Kathleen Lennon

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"Experience' –writes Robert Brandom- "is not one my words" (Brandom 2000: 205 n. 7). It is, on the contrary, one of the important words in Paul Gilbert's & Kathleen Lennon's *The World, the Flesh and the Subject*. In this paper I hope to reconstruct and present some aspects of their picture of the nature of experience. In particular I intend to highlight a tension between two features of their view. On the one hand, Gilbert and Lennon provide an account of experience as 'openness to the world'. This view commits them to see experiences as presentations rather than representations of features of reality. Thus, Gilbert and Lennon are committed to a position akin to John McDowell's disjunctivism. On the other hand, Gilbert and Lennon explicitly state that all psychological states, including experiences, are (partly) constituted by their reason-giving roles. The notion of reason involved in this account is that of a motivating reason, which is the kind of reason that is invoked in the explanation of the agent's behaviour. These two ideas, I argue, support conflicting accounts of the content of non-veridical perceptions.

### 1 Openness to the World

Unlike Donald Davidson, and Robert Brandom among others, Gilbert and Lennon take experiences to be distinctive intentional states as opposed to mere causal intermediaries between the world and belief.<sup>1</sup> Further, they endorse the thesis first formulated by Franz Brentano that intentionality, as directness toward intentional objects, is the mark of the mental.<sup>2</sup> Experiences thus are said to have intentional objects which are what the experiences are about.

Gilbert and Lennon, I will argue, have two quite different accounts of the nature and content of experience which cannot be easily reconciled. The first account describes experience in terms of "openness to the world".<sup>3</sup> They point out two features of this openness. First, experience presents its objects as mind-independent. Gilbert and Lennon take this feature of experience at face-value. In their view, the intentional objects of experience are "the actual things in the world which we perceive" (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 7). Second, what we experience in perception is the world itself, and not our sensations. For instance, when we look at a car, what we see is the car not its looks. It is true that we talk of hearing the peals of a bell, or smelling the smell of a rose. But in these instances too, we experiences smells and sounds as independent of our sensing of them. We think of them as out there, available for others to perceive. In other words, we think of the objects

1 Burwood, Gilbert and Lennon 1998, p. 130.

2 Gilbert and Lennon 2005, p. 7.

3 Cf. Gilbert and Lennon, 2005, p. 29.

of experience as objects that "cannot be somehow constructed out of their 'sensational' properties" (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 9).

Gilbert's and Lennon's reasons for taking seriously the idea that experience is openness to the world are primarily phenomenological. They basically point out that openness is an essential feature of experience as ordinarily conceived. They use some of Heidegger's rich descriptions of the contents of some experiences to highlight the fact that when explaining experiences we rely on the vocabulary of ordinary public objects.<sup>4</sup> I do not object to this argument, although it would not convince those against whom it is directed. Supporters of sense-data, conceived as inner objects, can be fully aware that their view is phenomenologically implausible. They might support it, nevertheless, because they believe that other views encounter even more serious objections.

It is useful to mention briefly these serious objections in order to home in onto some features of Gilbert's and Lennon's account of the nature of experience. The objections depend on well known problems concerning perceptual illusions and hallucinations. These problems have both epistemological and phenomenological dimensions. It is the latter that concerns us here. Crudely put, the argument from hallucination presents the philosopher who rejects sense-data with a dilemma. Both horns require that one abandons some aspect of the ordinary conception of experience, and thus joins sense-data theorists on the reformist band wagon.

Perceptions, and experiences seem to differ from thought and imagination because we can think about or imagine what is absent or does not exist, but we can only see or smell what is there. Only what is present can be given to the mind in experience. For McDowell these considerations support the view that perception is a relation to the facts themselves, rather than to representations of these facts. He makes this point when he writes that:

that things are thus and so is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject of the experience is not misled, that very same thing, that things are thus and so, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world. (McDowell 1994: 26)

I take this claim to embody the idea that perception is a relation between a perceiver and an aspect of the world, a fact. If we take this feature of our ordinary conception of experience seriously, we must when faced with the possibility of illusions and hallucinations conclude with McDowell that these are not genuine perceptual states. Thus, the approach preserves the ordinary conception of perception as an essential relation to its intentional objects and abandons the idea that both illusions and veridical perceptions are instances of some one common kind of psychological state. It is for this reason that the position is known as disjunctivism.

The best known contemporary alternative to disjunctivism is intentionalism. The view preserves the intuition that both illusions and veridical perceptions are instances of perceptions. But, as a result, it abandons the view that perception is essentially a relation to its intentional objects. It is a position that has been championed by Tim Crane.

For Crane, the intentional objects of psychological states, including perceptions, are the external objects themselves, rather than some strange stand-ins such as sense-data. However, in his view the existence of intentional objects is not essential for having psychological states. For instance, perceiving that there is a red apple on the tree, in Crane's view, requires that one is in a state of mind that counts as representing a red apple on the tree. It would be possible to be in such a state even though the apple did not actually exist. Hence, Crane denies that intentional states are (essentially) relations to real things. In other words, in his view my perception of the apple on the tree is not a relation between me and apples and trees, it is a relation between me and the intentional content or representation that there is a red apple on the tree.<sup>5</sup>

Gilbert and Lennon do not explicitly discuss either intentionalism or disjunctivism, but we can get closer to understanding their position by comparing it with these views. Despite lack of explicit

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4 Gilbert and Lennon 2005, p. 9.

5 The view is elaborated in Crane 2001, ch. 1.

pronouncements on their part, there are good reasons to believe that Gilbert and Lennon take experiences to be essentially relations to their intentional objects. Gilbert and Lennon warn their readers against being:

misled by talk of “representation” and “images” into supposing that there is something presented to the senses....such that there is a sense in which consciousness literally has contents- items depending upon it for their existence. (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 7)

Since for Crane to be in a psychological state is to be related to intentional contents whose existence is not essentially dependent on the external world but is so dependent on the existence of the mind, the view he endorses is the one Gilbert and Lennon warn us against. Further, their approval of the idea that the intentionality of the mind is understood as a relation to the outside world reinforces the conclusion that Gilbert and Lennon are opposed to Crane’s intentionalism.<sup>6</sup>

Gilbert’s and Lennon’s discussion of Heidegger’s views offers further comfort to this interpretation. As Gilbert and Lennon point out, for Heidegger, ‘the kind of dealing which is closest to us... is not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use’.<sup>7</sup> Heidegger’s point is that the manipulation of objects is characteristic of many of our interactions with the surrounding environment. The objects thus manipulated are treated as tools, or as equipment.

These interactions that involve the use of objects as equipment, which is to say as something available (*zuhanden*), are not blind.<sup>8</sup> They are not automatic or purely instinctual; they involve and presuppose cognitive activity. However, they are often successfully performed without much conscious thinking or focussing of attention on the task at hand. Instead, they are performed skilfully but unreflectively. Heidegger makes this point by writing that circumspection is the ‘kind of sight’ which guides our manipulation of things.<sup>9</sup>

Circumspection as the set of complex capacities that guides our skilful manipulation of things treated as equipment is, without doubt, a multifarious notion. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore its various dimensions but it will include all the abilities involved in hand-eye co-ordination, proprioception, kinaesthetic sense and many more. What matters for my purposes here is that Heidegger has brought about a paradigm shift in our philosophical understanding of what it means to have a mind. Instead of taking detached observation and thought as paradigmatic of cognition, he has focused his attention on our practical dealings with the world as exemplified by the skilful use of equipment.<sup>10</sup>

Heidegger’s focus on our practical dealings with the world guided by an attitude of concerned circumspection is not limited to the use of available entities as tools. First, he acknowledges the existence of what he calls ‘deficient modes of concern’, when one might be unconcerned and just look to see, or when things might present themselves as obtrusive, coming in the way of, rather than contributing to one’s plans.<sup>11</sup> Second, he also acknowledges that circumspective relations to our environment do not always involve the use of tools at all. This is apparent in the context of Heidegger’s discussion of the role of moods and emotions in shaping a world structured by saliences. In a summary of Heidegger’s position Gilbert and Lennon write:

Moods reveal the features of the world in virtue of which what we do matters to us in the way it does. That the world is a fearful place, for example, is what makes me cautious, and it is what makes it possible for me to be frightened by some specific thing in the world.

6 Gilbert and Lennon 2005, p. 2.

7 Heidegger 1962, H 67 quoted in Gilbert and Lennon 2005, p. 10 (references are to the pagination of the original German edition as is the convention).

8 Heidegger 1962, H69.

9 Heidegger 1962, H69.

10 Cf. Gilbert and Lennon 2005, p. 14.

11 Cf. Gilbert and Lennon, p. 10.

(Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 109)

Our moods alert us, they help us track and isolate some features of reality. They shape our worlds. If I find myself alone late at night at a railway station with very few people around, I might perceive the place as frightful. My mood attunes me to some features of the world, as opposed to others, as salient to what matters to me in the circumstances. I direct my attention away from billboards and their advertising messages, instead I pay particular attention to dark corners; I examine carefully the behaviour and appearance of the few people who are around. One person in particular might attract my attention; I might perceive that person as threatening. I thus become afraid of him, and respond to his behaviour in appropriate ways.

These are all behaviours that exhibit concerned circumspection, although they do not explicitly involve the use of any tools. My moods, emotions and actions shape my world as imbued with significance, but they also make it possible for the world to reveal itself as being in certain way for the kind of being that occupies a perspective like mine. What is peculiarly Heideggerian about this view is that the world thus presented in experience is itself structured by relations of appropriateness. More specifically what makes those available entities which are part of this world what they are is a matter of what kinds of responses to them are appropriate. In conclusion, because Gilbert and Lennon take from Heidegger the view that experience is openness to reality since in experience reality is presented to us; they must oppose Crane's intentionalism and adopt a position which is akin to McDowell's disjunctivism.<sup>12</sup>

## **2 Rationalising Explanations**

There is also another aspect to Gilbert's and Lennon's account of experience which is of a piece with their picture of the nature of all psychological states. In their view:

psychological states explain behaviour by showing how they provide our reasons for acting as we do. (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 2)

In other words, Gilbert and Lennon adopt a reason-giving account of all psychological states. Unlike functionalists who propose that we understand psychological states in terms of their mediating functional role between perceptual input and behavioural output, Gilbert and Lennon argue that psychological states are what makes the agent's actions intelligible by providing reasons for them.

They also add that:

reporting these [psychological] states involves revealing an aspect of the agent's perspective upon the world. What makes them reasons for an action is the fact that from this perspective that course of action is the appropriate thing to do. We understand her action just because we grasp that, and to grasp that involves imaginatively sharing her perspective' (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 2).

This statement, which clearly is intended to remind the reader of the Heideggerian position I have discussed above, is in fact often unpacked by Gilbert and Lennon in ways that are not easily reconciled with the view I have described above.

Gilbert and Lennon are explicitly committed to provide an account of experiences in terms of their reason-giving role. In order to begin to see what this claim might mean an example might be helpful. The experience of pain, which for instance I have when my hand is over a fire, explains my aversion to it, and the consequent attempt to move the hand away from the fire. Gilbert and Lennon do not merely intend to claim that the experience of pain caused the action of pain avoidance. When

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<sup>12</sup> Unlike McDowell however they claim that experiences can have non-conceptual contents, Gilbert and Lennon 2005, ch. 2.

they say that the experience explains the action, they do not have mere causal explanations in mind. Instead, they claim that the painfulness of pain explains the action because it provides the subject with reasons for a cluster of emotions, reactions, beliefs and desires (e.g., fearing the fire, crying out, wanting the pain to stop, believing that moving the hand from the fire will make it stop) which are manifested in the subject's actions.

Gilbert and Lennon gloss the idea of the reason-giving role of experience in terms of being part of what makes, from the agent's own perspective, her response to her situation appropriate.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for example, if I see a person shouting, grimacing and holding a burnt limb, I explain her actions by attributing to her psychological states that give her reasons to behave as she does. That is, to say, I make the agent's actions intelligible to me by trying to understand her reasons for acting as she does. In this example, I explain the agent's behaviour in terms of her experience of pain. This experience makes it appropriate for her to act as she does. In what follows I wish to argue that this gloss is ambiguous between two very different conceptions of the kind of reason that constitute the content of experiential states.

In order to unpack this feature of Gilbert's and Lennon's position it is useful to compare their views with the account provided by Gilbert in an earlier piece entitled 'Immediate Experience'. In that article Gilbert proposes what he calls a reason-giving account of experience. In his view:

to have an experience consists in coming to have a reason for desire and/or belief in a particular non-inferential kind of way. (Gilbert 1991: 243)

He adds that one explains the agent's action:

through adducing the agent's reasons [thereby] showing why [the action] is *appropriate* in that situation. (Gilbert 1991: 246)

He also claims that having some experience of a given situation makes holding some beliefs and desires appropriate to the situation.<sup>14</sup> Thus, I grasp other people's experiences by imagining what these experiences give them reasons to believe, desire or do. As Gilbert observes this is a view that explains the nature of experience in epistemic terms: what makes something an experience is wholly given by its epistemic role in patterns of reasoning. Thus, for Gilbert "the epistemological role of experience [is] not only essential to it but, more boldly, wholly *constitutive* of it" (Gilbert 1991: 243). Thus, for him, there is nothing more to having an experience than acquiring, in a special non-inferential way, reasons for some beliefs and or desires.

The position endorsed by Gilbert and Lennon in the later work is a refinement and a modification of this earlier view. First, they acknowledge that experiences can furnish reasons for a wider range of psychological states besides beliefs and desires. Emotions are the clearest example of one such kind of state. Second, they also claim that the reason-giving role of experience is not wholly constitutive of it. Before considering these refinements, however, it is useful to explore Gilbert's earlier view in greater detail so as to bring out its internal tensions which, I shall argue, are not wholly resolved in the later work.

It is a well known fact that our ordinary concept of the reason is invoked for two distinct purposes: explanation and justification. We appeal to reasons when we want to explain an individual's actions. I follow Michael Smith in calling this conception of a reason, a "motivating reason" (Smith 1994: ch. 4.2). Motivating reasons are intended to explain why the agent behaved as he did. The agent's actions are made intelligible in terms of his reasons and motives. Thus, motivating reasons must be psychologically real, they must be what moves the agent. We appeal to a different notion of reason, when we want to justify an agent's actions. Reasons so understood, which I call 'normative reasons', act as a justification (by the lights of the person who offers the relevant considerations) for the agent's behaviour. Both motivating reasons and normative reasons

<sup>13</sup> Gilbert and Lennon 2005, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Gilbert 1991, p. 243.

make agents' behaviour intelligible, which is why they count as reasons, but they are very different. Thus, if I see a person fleeing in fear, I can explain her actions by saying that she thought she was followed by a tiger. This explanation provides her reasons for their actions. But I can also add that she was wrong, and there was no tiger, so that she had no reason to flee. This second account, relies on the idea of a normative reason, and claims that the agent's behaviour was not justified.

Gilbert does not make this distinction between two notions of reason. His account, I believe is seriously weakened by this fact. Gilbert's initial introduction of the idea of experiences as reasons takes them as playing a role in the project of explaining a person's behaviour in terms of their reasons for action.<sup>15</sup> Further, he claims that an advantage of his position over its rivals is that:

the account explains why knowing what it is like to have an experience requires adopting the subject's perspective' because 'to grasp what reason [the experience] provides requires me to imagine having such a reason. (Gilbert 1991: 246)

The idea of having a reason presented here is that of a motivating reason.

These considerations support a specific motivating reason-giving account of experience. In this view, in order to grasp another person's experiences we observe their behaviour, we assume that this behaviour is rational by their own lights, and given our previous knowledge of their beliefs and desires, we grasp what their experiences must be like to move them to behave in that way. There is much in Gilbert's paper that supports attributing this view to him. Unfortunately, there are also claims that appear to conflict with this account. In particular Gilbert's arguments for the corrigibility of experience reports and for the non-conceptual character of the content of experience sit uneasily with his motivating reason-giving account of experience.

Gilbert claims that his account can make sense of the idea that reports of experience are corrigible.<sup>16</sup> He does not mean to suggest by this claim that some perceptions can be illusory. Rather, he thinks that we can be mistaken about the contents of our own experiences. Thus, suppose we are in a field, it is dark, and we see some large animals in the distance. Also, suppose that we take them to be bulls and make a speedy retreat. The animals, however, are cows. In Gilbert's view, in this instance we have an experience as of cows, even though we mistakenly take the experience to give us reasons to believe there are bulls in the field. Instead, "in fact [the experience] gives [us] a reason for thinking only that there is a cow" (Gilbert 1991: 245).

The notion of reason deployed by Gilbert in this context is not that of a motivating reason, but of a normative reason. This reason does not explain our fleeing behaviour in this instance. It is not the sort of reason that can be invoked to make our behaviour intelligible. Gilbert's remarks about perceptual illusions suggest that he supports a normative reason-giving account of the nature of experience, according to which the content of the experience is understood in terms of what the experience actually gives one reasons to believe.

Gilbert's defence of the idea that experiences can have non-conceptual contents also suggests that he is thinking of an account in terms of normative reasons. He defends the claim that experiences have non-conceptual contents by arguing that they can provide reasons for beliefs which we are not capable of entertaining. It is apparent that notion of reason at work in this context is normative. A reason for a belief I cannot have plays no motivating role.

There is little doubt that Gilbert is right that a person might have a (normative) reason to believe something, even though they are not actually able to believe it, because they lack the necessary concepts. Thus, suppose I see a bird in a tree, and I lack the concepts of nuthatch (which is a kind of tree creeping bird) and of tree creeper, when applied to birds. Gilbert claims that if the bird I see is a tree-creeper, then I have an experience as of a tree-creeper (and not a nuthatch) which gives me a reason to believe that there is a tree-creeper in the tree. He believes that my experience is of tree-creeper, although I have no concept of a tree-creeper, and I could not recognise another one if I

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Gilbert 1991, p. 242.

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert 1991, p. 245.

were presented with it. Further, the experience gives me a (normative) reason for the belief that there is a tree-creeper in the tree, although because of my conceptual deficiencies I could not actually form the belief.<sup>17</sup>

Gilbert defends his attribution of the content of being of a tree-creeper to the experience by claiming that this attribution offers the best explanation of the abilities I acquire on the basis of this experience. Thus, for I instance, on the basis of the experience I am able to draw a tree-creeper, something I might not have been able to do before. What Gilbert provides here is a compressed version of standard argument for the claim that experiences can have non-conceptual contents.

To summarise, there is at best an ambiguity and at worst an irreconcilable conflict at the heart of Gilbert's view because it oscillates between deploying two different notions of reason both of which are presented as constitutive of the content of experiences. The idea that the notion of reason at work in the account of experience is a motivating reason is sustained by the view that the account is intended to attribute to experience a central role in rationalising explanations of agent's behaviour. This is a crucial tenet of Gilbert's position and one that features centrally in the later work also. The idea that the notion of reason at work in the account of experience is a normative reason is sustained by the view that the account is opposed to intentionalism. This opposition, as we have already seen, is also preserved in the later work.

In the remainder of the paper I intend to assess whether the refined view which can be found in *The World, the Flesh and the Subject* is immune to the problems I have found in Gilbert's earlier work. There are as I have claimed significant differences between the two positions. In the later work, besides giving prominence to emotions and moods, Gilbert and Lennon also deny that experiences are wholly constituted by their reason-giving role. Instead, they claim that the problem with the accounts of experience offered by Heidegger and the early Merleau-Ponty is that 'they fail to capture the way that experiences are something over and above what we make of them in treating them as reasons for action'. Experiences:

somehow exceed their role in purposive activity by revealing a world in which activity is not just successful or unsuccessful, but a response to something beyond its subject which, through experience, controls her acts.<sup>18</sup> (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 43)

Despite these differences, the more recent view also relies on conflicting interpretations of the notion of reason at work. Thus, Gilbert and Lennon in one breath claim that "experiences justify, make appropriate, our responses ... to them" (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 33) and also that experiences provide a rational explanation why agents act as they do. The first claim deploys a normative notion of reason, while the second claim deploys a motivating notion. Further evidence for this ambiguity can be found in some of examples of the sort of reason giving roles Gilbert and Lennon attribute to experience. For instance, they consider the case of a person who sees a coffee cup, thinks it is his, and picks it up. The cup, however, belongs to another person. In this instance Gilbert and Lennon write that:

we explain some action in terms of the belief to which an experience gives rise: I picked something up because it looked like my coffee cup ... so my action was therefore reasonable in light of my experience. (Gilbert and Lennon 2005: 16)

In this example Gilbert and Lennon clearly presume that the individual in question has an experience whose content is that the cup is his own, and that such an experience provides the motivating reason for picking up the cup. Their formulation of the situation is a bit misleading since they claim that the person picked up the cup because it looked like his own. Clearly, we do not take things just because they look like something we own, rather we take something which looks like

<sup>17</sup> Gilbert 1991, p. 244.

<sup>18</sup> These refinements provide Gilbert and Lennon with the material necessary to provide a highly original account of the subjective character of experience.

something we own, because we think it is ours. Thus, the individual in our example must have the thought that cup is his, and that thought must be part of his reasons for picking it up. The experience if it is to provide a reason for the thought must have been a non-veridical experience of the cup as his own.

Here and elsewhere, Gilbert and Lennon provide an account of experience which is incompatible with strict adherence to their Heideggerian viewpoint. From that point of view, the action of the person who picks up somebody else's cup mistaking it for his own is not an appropriate response to content of his experience. The experience only gives him reason to believe that there is a cup which looks like his, but it provides no justification for the thought that he is being presented with his cup.

Personally, I am inclined to believe that this second account formulated in terms of the normative notion of reason is to be preferred, but I have not even tried to show that the other account cannot be made to work. My concern here has been to show that you cannot have both.

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# ***The World, The Flesh and The Subject: Replies***

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Firstly we would like to thank the editors for all the time and effort they have put in to organising this volume. Secondly we would like to thank the contributors for their careful and thoughtful replies to our work.

## **Søren Overgaard**

### *1. Chapter three and the use of the imaginary*

The question which is raised here concerns the terminology employed, particularly the term 'imaginary'. In this context it is suggested that to claim that our body and world is an imaginary body and world misrepresents the substance of what is being claimed, and is consequently confusing; for the term imaginary in common usage is tied to the illusory or the unreal. Here it is fair to say that one of the authors (PHG) agreed with you and himself raised this issue when the chapter was being hammered out. The other (KL) argued for this use of terminology because it was found in a number of texts which had influenced the ideas developed in this chapter.; eg. Gatens, Irigaray, Castoriadis, Butler. Viewing the Imagination as the Faculty which is necessary for there to be a real for us, and therefore as involved in giving shape or form to our worlds, has its origin in Kant. There was a deliberate attempt in this chapter to link that form giving role to the discussion in psychoanalysis of the *affective* content which our experiences of our worlds has. This is a content which is itself carried by the shape or form. This is what is signalled in these writers by the term *imaginary*. (There is a parallel here with the way that the physiognomy of the face carries expressive emotional content in Wittgenstein). There was however a reason why the term 'imaginary world' was used instead of 'life world' which Overgaard suggested. Whether justified or not in terms of Husserl's text, this concept has practical and often instrumentalist connotations. The affective content of our imaginary worlds precedes the formation of projects and even the formation of desire. The term life world then fails to signal the engagement with psychoanalytic thought which informs our use of the term 'imaginary'. This is however a technical use of the term and it clearly can be confusing.

There is also a trace of disappointment that the chapter did not include the phenomenological discussions of the imagination. Husserl, Heidegger in his discussion of Kant, Merleau Ponty and Sartre all have much to say here. Yes. This however is a big project and one which is being embarked on by KL.

### *2. The work of Husserl*

Yes a big omission and in retrospect we wish we had included more references. The problems of

his Cartesian overtones, which Overgaard points out, and our own knowledge and competence with regard to the authors we were discussing, influenced our decisions here. We therefore worked primarily with Heidegger and Merleau Ponty. None of these are really sufficient justifications, so point taken!

### 3. *Subjectivity and the point of view of the subject*

Overgaard is right that in the book there is an insistence on subjectivity as an embodied point of view onto the world. There is a refusal to do away with the psyche, with the notion of experience, in favour of the social, and also a refusal to rest with the 'they' world of Heidegger, insisting on the need to accommodate individual subjectivities. Of course the book doesn't go in for a lot of arguments. The characterisations are offered to see if they help to make sense of psychological phenomena. So what is it especially that we think cannot be made sense of without some commitment to subjectivities?

1. Most obviously we cannot make sense of experience without reference to a subject as a point of view on to the world. For us experience is necessarily perspectival. It has features which, to follow Thomas Nagel, cannot be grasped from an objective, or non-perspectival position. Experiences are not just brute items of the world entering into objective causal relations, mediating input and output. They are ways in which the world appears to subjects within it, and these appearances have characteristics which are lost from an objective viewpoint.

2. In relation to perception: we cannot provide an account of the world which is offered in perception purely in terms of a objective world of objects which impinge on a body producing certain dispositions to respond. For the world which is perceived is a world which differs according to the embodied positionality of the subject within it and *is salient to* that body. It offers possibilities for response and moreover makes those responses *appropriate*. Without the notion of experiencing subjects we cannot make sense of the very notion of certain responses *being* appropriate as something distinct from their being causally produced. Normativity on this account is perspectival.

3. In relation to agency: if we see our bodies as trained into performative compliance to public norms of behaviour we have exactly the same problem. We cannot make sense of that behaviour as something which we can understand and make sense of, as well as something which can be causally explained. Moreover the ready to *handness* of the world in which we act cannot be accommodated simply by objective spatial relations of our body to the world of objects in objective space.

4. There is another feature which seems to require subjectivity; namely the excessiveness which is a feature of sensory experience and which is discussed particularly in chapter two. Such excess is not something which is available within an account of a world conceived of objectively, as that which is governed solely by scientific laws.

5. In relation to Wittgenstein, how the world is for a subject is displayed on their body in a way that is open for others to view. The content of the display is grasped when we grasp what kind of actions it makes justifiable for the subject themselves, and what kind of responses it demands from us; all immanent within the contours of the expression itself. Grasping that the expression gives us the world as it is for a subject, is not to grasp an additional fact over and above that which shows that certain kind of responses are appropriate for us, and certain patterns of interactions possible between us and them. It is rather constituted out of these latter possibilities

6. The need for individual as well as collective subjectivities is discussed in our final chapter , where from this point of view the sense of alterity discussed in relation to Levinas, is probably playing the pivotal role. Here we did not develop the points which are so well highlighted in Overgaard's own publications, that without individual subjectivities we cannot make sense of the social as intersubjectivity.

### **Roberta Lanfredini**

1. The ontological questions concerning the reduction of psychological phenomena to physical phenomena characterised within a natural science framework, are not directly addressed within this book. It does however presuppose the anti reductionist position which we defended in our previous work (*Philosophy of Mind*, with Steve Burwood, 1998,UCL Press).

2. The scientific and manifest image: we would agree that the work we have offered is an account of the manifest image of the world. The world as it is experienced by embodied subjects within it. We would be less happy, however, to characterise such subjectivity in terms of interior qualitative contents, because that suggests a Cartesian picture of the mind as some kind of inner theatre, only available to the first person subject; which we would wish to avoid.

3. Consequently we would agree with the point, put forward in Lanfredini's account of Husserl, that consciousness is not a sack with objects placed within it.

4. In our account of the content of sensory experience the content of that experience is not ineffable. It is captured by its expression and by the responses it makes appropriate. However we accept that the experienced content exceeds such expressiveness, in away which reveals an externality, something beyond itself (cf. chp. 2 of our book).

6. We accept that perceptual content has a morphology, an organisation which does not always require (linguistic) conceptual content, though it can provide reasons for beliefs and actions. In this way perceptual content can provide justifications for belief in a way that Lanfredini suggests Schlick rejects.

7. We see the phenomenology of experience as an obstacle to reduction, but do not accept that the content of experience is only epistemologically available to the subject whose experiences they are. Following Wittgenstein we accept that the content of experience is captured by their expression and that such expressions are epistemically available to others.

8. In relation to the usefulness of Husserl, see our response to Overgaard above.

### **Alessandra Tanesini**

Tanesini suggests that the account of experience which we invoke in this book pulls in conflicting directions. Firstly she attributes to us an externalism about the content of experience. What fixes the content of experience is something in the world, out there, for others to perceive as well as ourselves. This is in opposition to a kind of representationalism which sees the content of experiences as being fixed by, in some sense, inner objects, whose existence is independent of the existence of the objects in the world which they represent. This she sees as committing us to disjunctivism; the claim that there is nothing (no inner representations) which are the same in veridical and non veridical experience. For the representationalist both experiences can exhibit the

same kind of inner object, while there is variation in objects in the world.

This externalist conception of perceptual content suggests for Tanesini that a further claim made in the book; namely that such content provides reasons for our responses to the world; can only be legitimately understood in one way. These reasons must be external or normative reasons; the kind that hold whether or not we recognise them. There seem to be two features of normative reasons. They must invoke some kind of public norm, which the agent may or may not endorse. They hold in virtue of what the facts really are, not what the agent takes them to be. These reasons, for Tanesini are what provide *justifications*. However we write as if the reasons provided by the content of experience were motivating reasons, the kind we can invoke when we *explain why* people act. But motivating reasons depend on real (inner?) states of the system ('they must be psychologically real', they must be what moves the agent'); and for us the content of experience does not rest on such inner states. Therefore the reasons they provide cannot be motivating reasons. Yet it seems we often write about the rationalising role of experience as if we were referring to motivating reasons.

The problem with such a reading, however, is that the account which we are offering doesn't fit the alternatives which Tanesini is offering, *either in relation to what constitutes the content of experiences or what it is to have a reason*.

Firstly the way content of experience is fixed cannot be in quite the externalist way Tanesini characterises. For we do not have a world of objects whose characteristics are fixed and which then fix content of thoughts and experiences. Yes our experiences are of a world, but this world is a world for us. Its characteristics are those which it presents to subjects from certain positions within it. The content of this experience is fixed by the responses to that world and the objects within it which it makes appropriate. This does not mean that we cannot make sense of non veridical perception. It is not however the case that in veridical perception we are standing in relation to some real feature of the world and in non veridical perception we are standing in relation to nothing. In each case we take the world to justify certain responses to it. In some cases intersubjectively it is agreed that such responses are justified and in other cases not. The world for her may seem hostile when intersubjectively it cannot be seen in this way. The communality between the two cases is in the responses which are taken to be justified. We make no attempt to ground this in a further communality, namely some shared inner representation. And in each case we stand in relations to our world. So there is some communality in the veridical and non veridical case, but it does not consist of some shared inner representation.

This seems to make sense of the tree creeper example, where we characterise the subjects experience in a way that makes her responses, including the drawing intelligible, even though the concept we use might not be available to the subject concerned. In the case of the cow and the bull there seem to be a range of possibilities. Given that I take a bull response to be justified, it would seem as if the world appeared to me as if it had bulls in it. But there are a variety of scenarios here. I might mistake a cow for a bull, but in the light, and given the angle, the cow might look like a bull, and my response would be justified. Or I might make a bull response but it not to be justified by the way the world appears, even to me. On reflection I might accept that the cow did not really look bullish, but my fear of bulls had intervened and led to my fearful response. And there are other possibilities.

It is also the case that, for us, the difference between normative and motivating reasons does not pan out in quite the way Tanesini, following Smith, suggests. This is partly because we are not talking about reasons as *explaining* in what seems like a causal way, the agent's acts and judgements. We are however concerned with reasons as making the performance of those acts intelligible; and in the light of the way the world is for the agent, which requires adopting the agent's perspective on to it. Therefore what provides these reasons are not some entirely externalist factual account of how the world is. They are therefore not normative reasons in the sense which Tanesini, and Smith, use this term. Neither, however, are the reasons we invoke motivating in the way at least Smith sees these as working. For Smith motivating reasons require 'psychologically

real (inner?) states' which can cause actions or feature in teleological explanations of them. These real psychological states seem to involve more than the way the world appears to the subject. It requires something additional to make these appearances have motivational force. But no such psychologically real inner states are required on our account. For us there is an internal link between the way the world appears to subjects and the justification/intelligibility of certain responses towards it. It is just this link we exploit in fixing the content of experience. It is also this internal link which we exploit when making responses of the agent intelligible. The world from certain points of view has certain saliences. Grasp of these saliences necessarily involves grasp that certain responses are merited. There is no explanatory use of reasons, making responses intelligible, which don't also invoke a claim of justification, the suggestion that the response was appropriate to certain characteristics of world. This does not rule out, of course, that we may be mistaken about these saliences in ways discussed above.