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Collective intentionality and plural pre-reflective self-awareness

In several recent texts, Hans Bernhard Schmid has argued that a proper understanding of collective intentionality and we-identity requires a convincing account of the “sense of ‘us’” and that headway can be made regarding the latter by drawing on classical theories of self-awareness (Schmid 2009, 2014a, 2014b). More specifically, Schmid argues that the “sense of ‘us’” amounts to a form of plural pre-reflective self-awareness, and as he writes, “Plural pre-reflective self-awareness plays the same role in the constitution of a common mind that singular pre-reflective self-awareness plays in the individual mind” (Schmid 2014a: 7). At the same time, however, Schmid also acknowledges that “there are important differences to consider”, in “spite of the striking similarities between the plural and the singular mind” (Schmid 2014a: 7). The aim of the following contribution is to assess these claims. How helpful is the appeal to pre-reflective self-awareness, and might the differences between the singular and the plural case ultimately overshadow their similarities?

1. The singular case

To assess Schmid’s proposal, it is important first to get clear on what exactly singular pre-reflective self-awareness is and what role it might play in the constitution of the individual mind. The very notion of pre-reflective self-awareness is normally associated with the work of Sartre (1957, 2003), but the core idea, the idea that reflective self-awareness is a latecomer and depends on the contribution of a more basic form of self-awareness, is widespread and can be found in figures from a variety of different philosophical traditions. In addition to Sartre, many other phenomenologists, including Husserl, Stein, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Henry defended the view (for a comprehensive critical discussion, see Zahavi 1999). Outside of phenomenology, similar ideas can be found *grosso modo* in the work of a group of German philosophers comprising Henrich, Cramer, Pothast and Frank and known as the *Heidelberg School* (see, e.g., Henrich 1970, Frank 1991, Zahavi 2007). Recently, figures in analytic philosophy of mind such as, for instance, Kriegel and Strawson, have defended comparable ideas (Kriegel 2009, Strawson 2010), the former by advocating a type of neo-Brentanian self-representationalism.

There are subtle differences between the different accounts, but they are all united in their rejection of the idea that self-awareness comes about as the result of reflection or higher-order representation. The arguments differ, but here is one of them:

According to the traditional competing account, self-awareness comes about when the mind directs its gaze inwards and attends to its own mental operations. On this account, self-awareness involves a subject-object relation between two different mental states, the reflecting and the reflected. Of course, the aim of reflection is ultimately to overcome or negate this division or difference and to posit both

moments as identical—otherwise we would not have a case of *self*-awareness. But how is this to be accomplished, how can the identity of the two relata be certified without presupposing that which it is meant to explain? If the reflecting state is to encounter something as itself, if it is to recognize or identify something as itself, it needs a prior acquaintance with itself. As Cramer puts it,

How should the reflective subject be able to know that it has itself as an object? Obviously only by knowing that it is identical with its object. But it is impossible to ascribe this knowledge to *reflection* and to *ground* it in reflection. The act of reflection presupposes that the self *already knows* itself, in order to know that that which it knows when it takes itself as an object is indeed identical with the one that accomplishes the act of reflective thinking. The *theory* that tries to make the *origin* of self-awareness comprehensible through reflection ends necessarily in a circle that presupposes the knowledge it wants to explain (Cramer 1974: 563).

In order for me to recognize a certain object as myself, I need to hold something true of it that I already know to be true of myself, and the only way to avoid an infinite regress is by accepting the existence of a prior non-objectifying self-acquaintance. In analytic philosophy of mind, a similar line of thought is found in Shoemaker:

The reason one is not presented to oneself ‘as an object’ in self-awareness is that self-awareness is not perceptual awareness, i.e., is not a sort of awareness in which objects are presented. It is awareness of facts unmediated by awareness of objects. But it is worth noting that if one were aware of oneself as an object in such cases (as one is in fact aware of oneself as an object when one sees oneself in a mirror), this would not help to explain one’s self-knowledge. For awareness that the presented object was ϕ , would not tell one that one was oneself ϕ , unless one had identified the object as oneself; and one could not do this unless one already had some self-knowledge, namely the knowledge that one is the unique possessor of whatever set of properties of the presented object one took to show it to be oneself. Perceptual self-knowledge presupposes non-perceptual self-knowledge, so not all self-knowledge can be perceptual (Shoemaker & Swinburne 1984: 105).

This reasoning holds true even for self-knowledge obtained through introspection. That is, it will not do to claim that introspection is distinguished by the fact that its object has a property, which immediately identifies it as being me, since no other self could possibly have it, namely the property of being the private and exclusive object of exactly my introspection. This explanation will not do, since I will be unable to identify an introspected self as myself by the fact that it is introspectively observed by me, unless I know it is the object of *my* introspection, i.e., unless I know that it is in fact *me* that undertakes this introspection. This knowledge cannot itself be based on identification if one is to avoid an infinite regress (Shoemaker 1968: 561-563).

None of these positions denies the existence of reflective, thematic, explicit self-awareness. The claim, however, is that reflective self-awareness presupposes and is conditioned by pre-reflective self-awareness. A further claim is that this basic self-awareness is a constitutive feature and integral part of phenomenal consciousness as such. It is what provides the state with its phenomenal presence. A mental state lacking this kind of self-awareness would be a non-conscious state, it would not be experientially manifest. Such a view is not unique to traditions in Western philosophy, since so-called reflexivist or self-illumination (*svaprakāśa*) theories in classical Indian philosophy have likewise defended it and argued that a conscious state simultaneously discloses both the object of consciousness and the conscious state itself (MacKenzie 2008).

At this point, however, an issue of contention arises. Given that many defenders of pre-reflective self-awareness would argue that we do not need to look at anything above, beyond or external to experience itself in order to understand the unity we find within experience (since experiences are self-unifying both at and over time), many of them would also argue that there is no reason to introduce a self. To put it differently, many have argued that self-awareness merely entails that consciousness is aware of *itself*, and not that it is also aware of an experiencing *self*. As Lichtenberg phrased it in his classical objection to Descartes: To say cogito and to affirm the existence of an I is already to say too much (Lichtenberg 2000: 190). In reply, however – and this is also a move favored by Schmid – pro-selfers have argued that the objection is fuelled by a too narrow definition of what selfhood amounts to. In *La transcendance de l'ego*, Sartre initially defended a so-called non-egological account of consciousness, but as he later wrote in *L'être et le néant*, “pre-reflective consciousness is self-consciousness. It is this same notion of *self* which must be studied, for it defines the very being of consciousness” (Sartre 2003: 100). Indeed, as he pointed out in the chapter “The self and the circuit of selfness” in *Being and Nothingness*, consciousness is not impersonal when pre-reflectively lived through, but characterized by a “fundamental selfness” (Sartre 2003: 127). Rather than defining self-awareness on the basis of a preconceived notion of self, Sartre proposed that we should let our conception of self arise out of a proper understanding of self-awareness. The same idea can be found in Henry, who states that the most basic form of selfhood is the one constituted by the very self-manifestation of experience (Henry 1963: 581).

On a traditional conception of the self, it is considered a principle of identity that remains distinct from the stream of changing experiences. On a more deflationary conception, the self is defined in experiential terms as the very first-person mode of experiencing. Although pre-reflective self-awareness does not warrant the positing of a separate and distinct self, pre-reflective self-awareness is ineliminable first-personal, and it has been argued that this is all that is required in order to warrant the notion of an experiential self. As it has occasionally been phrased, experiences necessarily involve what-it-is-likeness, but experiential what-it-is-likeness is properly speaking what-it-is-like-*for-me*-ness (Zahavi & Kriegel 2016).

This quick overview leaves many questions and disagreements untouched (for a more extensive discussion, see Zahavi 1999, 2005, 2014). However, for the discussion that follows, these are the central points:

- We are self-aware prior to any explicit act of reflection, any self-identification or self-recognition. Indeed, the three latter accomplishments all presuppose a prior pre-reflective self-awareness.
- Pre-reflective self-awareness can be attributed to all phenomenally conscious creatures, and not merely to, say, rational adults.
- The unity of consciousness is an intrinsic feature of our experiential life, and not the result of a particular accomplishment. It is not dependent on, say, normative coherence or rational integration.
- To say that an experience is first-personal, to say that it is characterized by its what-it-is-like-*for-me*-ness, is to say something more than that it simply occurs in someone (a ‘me’). It is to state not only a metaphysical fact, but also a phenomenological fact.

2. *The Plural Case*

As mentioned above, Schmid has proposed that ideas from the discussion of pre-reflective self-awareness can reinvigorate the debate on collective intentionality. As he writes,

[P]lural pre-reflective self-awareness constitutes a plural self and a plural perspective (we-perspective) in the same way in which an individual mind, and a first-person-singular-perspective, is constituted by an individual ‘sense of self,’ or, as it is more commonly called, by individual pre-reflective self-awareness (Schmid 2014a: 12).

I shall argue that plural self-awareness plays the same role between minds as singular self-awareness plays within individual minds. Selfhood does not only come in the singular but also in the plural (Schmid 2014a: 15).

To understand Schmid’s motivation for this move, let us consider the case of experiential sharing.¹ Whereas it might be relatively obvious what sharing means when it concerns objects such as a toothbrush, a cab, a cake, a bottle of wine or an apartment, it is less clear what exactly sharing means when applied to experiential states. Whereas sharing in the former cases isn’t simply a question of sharing objects of the same type or qualitative identity, but a question of sharing the numerical identical object, many theorists are, as Schmid observes, committed to both *ontological* and *epistemological individualism* when it comes to the sharing of experiential states. According to ontological individualism, experiential states are necessarily owned, they are necessarily the states of somebody, and this somebody has to be an individual. In short, only individuals can be the subjects of experiential states. According to epistemological individualism, individuals have a privileged access to their own mental states, a direct access that provides them with a special kind of first-person authority regarding their own experiential life, whereas they lack such an access to the experiential states of others (Schmid 2009: 72, 74). Because

¹ The following paragraphs on Schmid’s analysis of sharing draws on León, Szanto and Zahavi 2017.

of this joint commitment, it is widely assumed that people cannot literally share a token experience. For two individuals to, say, share an experience of joy, is for each individual to have his or her own token of the same type of experience and in addition some accompanying mutual knowledge (Schmid 2009: xv, 69). Schmid rejects this account and instead argues that experiential states can be shared in the straightforward sense of the term:

there is a sense in which it is literally true that when a group of people has an emotion, there is one feeling episode, one phenomenal experience in which many agents participate. Group emotions are shared feelings. Shared feelings involve some ‘phenomenological fusion’. They are ‘shared’ in the strong straightforward sense in which there is one token affective state in which many individuals take part (Schmid 2014b: 9)

In defending a token identity account of emotional sharing, Schmid is partially inspired by Scheler. Here is a central quote from *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*:

The father and the mother stand beside the dead body of a beloved child. They feel in common the ‘same’ sorrow, the ‘same’ anguish. It is not that A feels this sorrow and B feels it also, and moreover that they both know they are feeling it. No, it is a *feeling-in-common*. A’s sorrow is in no way ‘objectual’ for B here, as it is, e.g. for their friend C, who joins them, and commiserates ‘with them’ or ‘upon their sorrow’. On the contrary, they feel it together, in the sense that they feel and experience in common, not only the self-same value-situation, but also the same keenness of emotion in regard to it. The sorrow, as value-content, and the grief, as characterizing the functional relation thereto, are here *one and identical* (Scheler 2008: 12-13, translation modified).

Schmid takes Scheler to claim that the feeling of grief in the above-mentioned case is shared by the parents in the straightforward sense of the word. The parents do not merely have emotions of the same type or matching individual feelings. Rather “while both individuals experience a feeling of grief, there are not two feelings involved in this case, but only *one*. The parents’ feeling of grief is *numerically identical*” (Schmid 2009: 69).²

² Although this is a minor issue, I find this interpretation unpersuasive. Slightly later in *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, Scheler comes back to the example of the grieving parents, and then writes that “the process of feeling in the father and the mother is given separately in each case; only what they feel – the one sorrow – and its value-content, is immediately present to them as identical” (Scheler 2008: 37). In the last part of *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, Scheler again returns to the question of emotional sharing, and states that some emotions can be shared vicariously. He exemplifies it with the case of sorrow, and then writes that an identical sorrow can be keenly felt, but as he then importantly adds, “though in one’s own individual fashion” (Scheler 2008: 255). If the process of feeling is given separately

But what does it mean to be a subject of a conscious state? Schmid claims that conscious states are pre-reflectively conceived and interpreted by the subjects that have them. As a result, the expression “subject of a conscious state” is ambiguous. We need to distinguish between 1) the subject that has the conscious state in question and 2) the subject *as who* the subject takes himself to have the state in question (Schmid 2009: 77). One way to understand this distinction is to take it as a distinction between an ontological and a phenomenological reading of what it means to be a subject of a conscious state. On the one hand, we can inquire about who ontologically speaking is the subject of the conscious state. On the other hand, we can inquire about how the subject him- or herself experiences, apprehends, interprets or conceives of the ownership in question. Schmid’s suggestion is that the answers to these two questions do not have to coincide. Whereas epistemological and ontological individualism might hold true in the first case, they do not necessarily hold true in the second case. In short, although ontologically speaking, only individuals can be the subjects of mental states, and although only they have direct access to their own mental states, phenomenologically speaking, several individuals can share a certain mental state and experience it, not as *mine* or *yours*, but as *ours* (Schmid 2009: 78). Whereas there ontologically speaking might be two experiences, there might phenomenologically speaking be only one, i.e., experiences can be counted by ontological subject or by phenomenological subject, and as Schmid insists there “*is no reason why one way of counting should be more legitimate than the other*” (Schmid 2009: 81). Thus, whereas Schmid concedes that the parents in Scheler’s example ontologically speaking are two different persons each of which has his or her own feeling (Schmid 2009: 77), this does not preclude them from fusing phenomenologically to such an extent that they are experiencing the very same sorrow.³ The existence of shared feelings consequently threatens epistemological individualism:

In the case of shared feelings – shared grief, worries, and joys – there is a sense in which it is simply not the case that “I can’t really know how you feel,” because my feeling *is* your feeling, or rather: my feeling isn’t really mine, and yours isn’t yours, but *ours*. Shared feelings are conscious experiences whose subjective aspect is not singular (‘for me’), but plural (‘for us’) (Schmid 2014b: 9).

to the father and mother, and if the identical sorrow in each case is felt in one’s own individual fashion, it seems implausible to ascribe Scheler the view that the same token experience is shared by both.

³ Whereas Schmid in *Plural Action* from 2009 insisted on the difference but equal status of the ontological and phenomenological reading, he later seems to have changed his mind. In “Plural self-awareness” from 2014, for instance, Schmid distances himself from the “claim that the phenomenological dimension of subjectivity can be neatly distinguished from the ontological level” (2014a: 22). I think the latter view is more in line with the account of singular selfhood outlined above. However, this latter view obviously also goes hand in hand with a substantially more robust ontological commitment.

Schmid's central claim is now that the notion of plural pre-reflective self-awareness can help us understand and clarify this 'sense of 'us''. Plural pre-reflective self-awareness is precisely the non-thematic, non-inferential and non-observational awareness of our intentions/emotions/attitudes as *ours*. On Schmid's account, the what-it-is-like of emotional sharing is precisely a what-it-is-like for *us* (Schmid 2014a: 14). As we have already seen, however, Schmid interprets this as amounting to a form of phenomenal fusion, namely as the experience of one plural self. Just as individual pre-reflective self-awareness constitutes a basic form of singular selfhood, plural pre-reflective self-awareness constitutes plural selfhood. Importantly, Schmid does not conceive of this plural self as some kind of larger singular 'I', but precisely as a self with more than one participant. Schmid even argues that such a phenomenal fusion leaves room for an awareness of interpersonal difference, though he emphasizes that the difference in question is not between distinct subjects, but between different parts of a unified whole. Schmid consequently tends to think of shared emotions as wholes to which individuals contribute their parts (Schmid 2014b: 10).

3. *Plurality, normativity, and development*

In the process of articulating and defending his view, Schmid stipulates a number of requirements that an account of emotional sharing must be able to meet:

Firstly, it has to be compatible with basic forms of individual self-awareness. People do not have to mistake themselves for another, or feel completely dissolved in some group consciousness in order to share a feeling. Secondly, it has to be compatible with the knowledge that any feeling one takes to be shared might not actually be shared at all. Thirdly, it has to leave room for the experience of (partial) separateness of our conscious lives. Not all feelings are shared. And ultimately, it has to conform to the experience that very often (if not always), the sharedness of a feeling is a matter of the qualitative difference between the individual contributions (Schmid 2009: 79).

Let me focus on the fourth requirement, which Schmid also calls the *difference condition* (Schmid 2009: 79). Consider the case of a shared feeling of joy after a successful performance of a symphony. The composer, the musicians and the audience are simultaneously all sharing one and the same joy, but this is not to deny that the exuberance of the composer, the contentment of the oboist, and the delight of a member of the audience are qualitatively different (Schmid 2009: 81-82). But can this really be reconciled with the token identity claim? Consider the old story about the group of blind men who sought to determine what an elephant is like by touching it. Each felt a different part, the trunk, the tusk, the side, the leg, the tail or the ear, and in turn concluded that the elephant was like a snake, a spear, a wall, a tree, a rope or a fan. One reason though, why all of these experiences were experiences of the same was because they all targeted different aspects of the same *object*. Likewise, different feelings of joy can, of course, target the same object, say, the same performance. But that is uncontroversial, and is not what

Schmid has in mind. Rather, his proposal seems to be that whereas the feeling is identical, the experiences of the feeling can differ, that is, one and the same feeling of, say, joy can *at one and the same time* be felt differently by different individuals. But shouldn't this give us pause? A feeling is not an object, but an experience, and whereas it makes good sense to say that we must distinguish an object and the experience(s) of the object, it is harder to make sense of the proposal that we ought to distinguish between an experience (the feeling) and the experience of that experience. In fact, the only way I can make sense of the latter would be by conceiving of the relation between the feeling (the experience) and the way it feels (our awareness of it) as an act-object relation. But this would defeat the purpose of appealing to pre-reflective self-awareness, since that notion was precisely introduced in an attempt to move beyond the assumption that the givenness of an experience is always a form of object-givenness. I consequently cannot see how Schmid's attempt to reconcile the token identity account with the difference condition allows him to preserve the very notion of pre-reflective self-awareness.

A further challenge to the supposed match between the singular and the plural case can be found in Schmid's focus on the normative unity of the mind. On his account, the normative integration of the individual mind is an achievement rather than a mere given. It is self-awareness in its self-evaluative role that allows for this achievement by pushing and driving us towards a consistency of attitudes (2014a: 16). What holds true in the individual case, also holds true in the plural case. In plural self-awareness there is also a normative pressure for coherence between the attitudes of the interacting individuals, which is what allows for joint commitment (2014a: 18). Schmid's appeal to normativity in this context is somewhat reminiscent of Rovane's construal of personal and group identity. On her view, it is by committing themselves to take certain attitudes as the normative basis from which to reason and act that rational agents (including group agents) come to have their own distinct points of view and, thereby, their own identities (Rovane 2012). Schmid is aware of the similarity, but argues that Rovane's account needs to be complemented with "a phenomenological dimension" (Schmid 2014a: 20). I agree, but the problem is that Schmid's own normative considerations are quite alien to and absent from the phenomenological accounts of (singular) pre-reflective self-awareness. The latter accounts certainly have something to say about (minimal) diachronic and synchronic unity. But they typically consider this unity a given rather than a normative achievement. Synchronically co-occurring experiences and diachronically dispersed experiences are all part of the same mind insofar as they are characterized by the same for-me-ness. Their unity is not the result of a self-evaluative (reflective) process, it is not unique to rational agents, but explained as the result of a passive process of temporalization characterizing phenomenal consciousness per se. There is certainly more to rational unity than this, just as there is more to the temporality of human existence than what is spelled out in a formal investigation of inner time-consciousness, but it is not within the purview of an account of pre-reflective self-awareness to explain these more complex kinds of unity. Whereas the former might constitute a necessary condition for the latter, it does not constitute a sufficient one. For the same reason, one must be critical of the suggestion that plural pre-reflective self-awareness constitutes a plural self and a plural perspective in the same way individual pre-reflective self-awareness constitutes a singular self and a first-person perspective.

We are now approaching the core of Schmid's own positive proposal. In "Plural Self-awareness" he acknowledges the transitory character and status of the *we*, and writes:

Two people team up spontaneously and thereby think and act from a common perspective, based on a 'sense of 'us;'' barely a minute later, they part ways never to meet again, and so whatever 'plural self' might have existed between them is gone (Schmid 2014a: 22).

This seems quite right, but it also gives rise to the question of how this process comes about. How is it that the two persons come to share a perspective? What are the cognitive and/or affective preconditions for a shared *we*-perspective? Does it come about through communication, joint attention, joint declaration, group-identification, perspective taking, etc.? Schmid denies the legitimacy of this line of questioning, however, since he takes it to involve a commitment to a form of unacceptable reductionism, one that involves either a *petitio principii* or an infinite regress (Schmid 2014a: 10–11). Instead, Schmid argues that the *we* is conceptually and developmentally foundational. It does not originate in any kind of agreement, or commitment, or communication, or joint action. It is not founded upon any form of social cognition, it doesn't presuppose any experience or givenness of another subject, let alone any kind of reciprocal relation between *I* and *you* or self and other. Rather, the *we*, the 'sense of us' or 'plural self-awareness,' precedes the distinction between yours and mine, is prior to any form of intersubjectivity or mutual recognition, and is itself the irreducible basis for joint action and communication (Schmid 2005: 138, 145, 149, 296). To attempt to account for group-membership by arguing that the prospective members have to identify with the group in question, for instance, fails to realize that such an identification is always after the fact. It merely confirms a felt sense of 'us-ness' that is already in place. To claim that groups come about through some process of declaration also ignores the fact that the declarative act is something the participating individuals have to perform *jointly*. Shared intentionality is consequently presupposed (Schmid 2014a: 10). Likewise with any act of communication (including even pre-verbal dyadic attention): Such acts cannot establish shared meaning since they must be jointly accepted as having meaning in order to be at all communicative. To put it differently, communication is an irreducible joint action and therefore presupposes *we*-intentions. It is *we* who are communicating together, and since communication presupposes a pre-existing 'sense of us,' the former cannot explain or establish or secure the latter (Schmid 2014a: 11).

As already mentioned, it is important for Schmid to emphasize that the *we* must be understood as minds-in-relation, rather than as some kind of undifferentiated unity. The *we* involves a plurality and is not some kind of larger scale *I* (Schmid 2009: 156). But he also considers the *we* a fundamental explanans and rejects any attempts to explain it further. On the one hand, this move resembles the way in which defenders of the notion of pre-reflective self-awareness have proceeded. They have typically also rejected reductive explanations of self-awareness (and phenomenal consciousness), and insisted that the attempt to explain self-awareness by means of some kind of self-objectification, self-identification, or self-

reflection is always too late. It presupposes what it is supposed to explain.⁴ On the other hand, one might have assumed that Schmid would at least have conceded that plural pre-reflective self-awareness (and the ‘sense of us’) presupposes and builds upon singular pre-reflective self-awareness (and the ‘sense of me’), and that it to that extent is less fundamental. In “Plural self-awareness,” however, Schmid distances himself from the proposal that only individuals who are individually self-aware can have plural self-awareness and that plural self-awareness necessarily presupposes or implies singular self-awareness (Schmid 2014a: 21-22). As he writes,

Looking at the evidence from developmental psychology, I am not entirely convinced, though, that the sense of one’s own singular self as having an attitude really precedes an individual’s sense of plural selfhood. [...] [I]t may well be that the way in which singular self-awareness develops is by means of becoming aware of oneself as an individual member in a group. In other words, singular self-awareness may have its roots in the self-awareness as a member, and this involves plural self-awareness (Schmid 2014a: 22-23).

Pointing to findings pertaining to *social referencing*, Schmid writes that small children do not seem to draw a clear line between their own goals and the goals of others, nor do they seem to be aware of their own beliefs as theirs, in a singular rather than in a plural way. To argue that group-membership and we-identity presuppose some component of singular pre-reflective self-awareness and for-me-ness that is beyond any membership is consequently to put the cart before the horse, since singular self-awareness presupposes plural self-awareness (Schmid 2014a: 23).

Insofar as this is supposed to be an empirical claim, I think there are reasons to be skeptical. Children start to show in-group biases and group conformity around 3-4 years of age (Corriveau and Harris 2010; Haun and Tomasello 2011). Such findings are good indicators of the presence of sensitivity to group affiliation, but children are certainly able to distinguish their own goal and point of view from that of others much earlier. Indeed, early joint attention interactions presuppose awareness of the divergence between one’s own and other’s point of view, since the whole point of, say, proto-declaratives is to bring someone else’s focus of attention in line with one’s own (Roessler 2005). Even more importantly, children possess self-awareness long before they show any awareness of group-membership. This is the case even on Gallup’s conservative estimate, according to which the ability to pass the mirror self-recognition task is the crucial litmus test for the possession of self-awareness (Gallup 1977). Children can pass this test around 18-24 months of age. Other developmentalists, however, have argued that Gallup’s test targets a sophisticated form of self-awareness and have instead insisted that infants already have a sense of themselves as differentiated, environmentally situated, and agentic entities from shortly after birth (Neisser 1993, Stern 1985, Rochat 2001, Rochat & Zahavi 2011). As

⁴ This does not entail, however, that pre-reflective self-awareness is necessarily considered unanalyzable. Husserl’s writings on inner time-consciousness, for instance, contain an attempt to analyze the (micro-)structure of self-awareness.

shown by Rochat, new-borns are able to discriminate self- versus non-self-stimulation (Rochat 2001: 40-41).

These empirical claims aside, we should not forget what was earlier said about pre-reflective self-awareness and experiential selfhood. On this account, phenomenal consciousness entails pre-reflective self-awareness and a minimal form of selfhood (Zahavi 1999, 2005, 2014). If so, infants obviously also possess pre-reflective self-awareness and selfhood from the moment they have experiences. The only way to reconcile such a view with the idea that plural self-awareness precedes singular self-awareness would be by endorsing a radical form of social constructivism, according to which phenomenal consciousness is a social construct. In addition to being independently implausible, such a proposal is in direct tension with the arguments traditionally presented in defense of and as motivation for the existence of pre-reflective self-awareness. I doubt Schmid would have any sympathy for such a position, which just makes it even more surprising that he would consider assigning developmental priority to plural pre-reflective self-awareness.⁵

4. Conclusion

The aim of this article was not to provide a comprehensive assessment of Schmid's theory of we-intentionality, nor to present my own ideas on the topic. There is much of value in Schmid's work, just as there are core ideas of his concerning the relation between collective intentionality and interpersonal understanding with which I disagree, and which I have critically discussed elsewhere (Zahavi & Rochat 2015, Brinck, Reddy, Zahavi 2017, Zahavi 2016). The aim was simply to determine whether Schmid is right in arguing that one can clarify the nature and structure of collective intentionality and we-identity by drawing on the classical discussions of pre-reflective self-awareness.

Let me summarize my findings. I do not think Schmid's claim that "Plural pre-reflective self-awareness plays the same role in the constitution of a common mind that singular pre-reflective self-awareness plays in the individual mind" (Schmid 2014a: 7) can be maintained. There are striking differences. In his account of how plural pre-reflective self-awareness constitutes a shared perspective and a common mind, Schmid focuses on the role of normative integration. But such an appeal to normativity, I have argued, is absent from both the classical and the more contemporary accounts of pre-reflective self-awareness that we find in, say, Husserl, Sartre, Henry, Frank, Zahavi and Kriegel. This is so, regardless of whether we are talking of synchronic or (minimal) diachronic unity. This is not to deny that there is an important link between unity and normativity, but the link in question is not to be found on the basic pre-reflective level, but only on more elaborate and complex levels (cf. Zahavi 2014).

More generally speaking, any attempt to stress the similarity between singular and plural pre-reflective self-awareness is confronted with the following problem. Pre-reflective self-awareness is

⁵ Let me be clear that I am not questioning the claim that there are (more advanced) forms of individual self-awareness that depend on group-membership and social interaction. My reservation only concerns singular pre-reflective self-awareness. For more on this topic, see Zahavi 2016 and 2017.

rightly seen as an explanans, i.e., as something that allows us to explain certain other phenomena and accomplishments, including reflective self-awareness and explicit group-identification. However, singular pre-reflective self-awareness and plural pre-reflective self-awareness do not have the same explanatory power since they are not equally fundamental. If one accepts the standard account of singular pre-reflective self-awareness, which considers it a constitutive feature of phenomenal consciousness as such, it does not depend on and presuppose plural pre-reflective self-awareness, but is rather a condition of possibility for the latter. In short, there can be singular pre-reflective self-awareness without plural pre-reflective self-awareness, but not vice-versa. But if one of them is more fundamental than the other, they are significantly dissimilar. To try to solve this tension by claiming that they are both equally fundamental and somehow equiprimordial, is a theoretically unsatisfactory ad hoc move.

In his more detailed analysis of emotional sharing, Schmid argues that shared feelings are conscious experiences whose subjective aspect is plural; in the case of, say, shared joy, the joy is no longer simply experienced by me as *yours* and/or *mine*, but as *ours*. The notion of plural pre-reflective self-awareness is precisely meant to capture this *what-it-is-like-for-us-ness*. However, in his attempt to reconcile the claim that several individuals can simultaneously share one and the same token feeling with the claim that different individuals can experience the shared feeling in qualitatively different ways, Schmid seems forced to introduce an act-object structure into plural pre-reflective self-awareness, and this move is in clear conflict with the standard account of pre-reflective self-awareness.

Finally, and least importantly, there is an ambiguity in Schmid's analysis of the relation between ontology and phenomenology that also potentially weakens his claim concerning the parallelism between pre-reflective self-awareness in the singular and the plural case.

I agree with Schmid that a convincing theory of we-intentionality has to factor in the experiential dimension. I also think it is very important to account for pre-reflective we-relationships, i.e., we-relationships that are lived through rather than being thematically observed or reflectively articulated. I accept his claim that different individuals can share feelings although what they actually experience differs and that part of the reason for claiming that there is nevertheless a certain overarching unity to the different experiences is due to the fact that they match or complement each other. I also very much endorse the idea that what individuals think and feel when they do it together is not independent of their relation. I am sympathetic to Schmid's attempt to offer a non-reductive account of we-intentionality – though I do not think that rules out that we-intentionality has important interpersonal preconditions. There is, in short, a lot of agreement. I do not think, however, that an endorsement of these different ideas necessarily forces one to accept a token identity account of experiential sharing. I think the attempt to understand we-intentionality on the basis of a notion of phenomenal fusion risks generating more

confusion than clarification. And most importantly, I think that a closer study of singular and plural pre-reflective self-awareness will reveal that the differences dwarf the similarities.^{6,7}

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⁶ As already mentioned, Schmid does acknowledge the existence of certain differences (cf. 2014a), but the differences he points to are different from the one's I have outlined, and none of these differences makes him question the relevance and explanatory power of the notion of plural pre-reflective self-awareness.

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