



Awareness of Self Attention⁴

Jan Górski (1912)

translated by Krzysztof Gajda

Internal sensations, especially organic ones, are not only the foundation of our consciousness of life and self but also an integral part of each feeling. This is probably the origin of the genuine affinity between feelings and consciousness of life and self, an affinity that manifests itself even in speech. Indeed, the expression “sense of self” is more natural than saying “representing” or even “imagining one’s self”. It is also easier and neater to talk in French about “sentiment du moi” than “representation du moi”; the expression “das Ichgefühl” is less grating than “die Ichvorstellung”, the latter being rather used to mean the conceived self as opposed to the self of which one is conscious all the time. The self is not a feeling, however, if only because there are no feelings that would be equally constant or, to be more precise, that would recur with equal constancy. Even so, we can say it is closer to emotive states than to any representation or mental image. [...]

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I have already mentioned on several occasions that there is a certain permanent relationship between, on the one hand, consciousness of life and self, and, on the other, an emotional state; as self-consciousness weakens or changes, we become less conscious of life and experience a drop in the general intensity of our feelings. We can now understand the nature of these relationships and the real reason behind the parallel. Leaving aside the question of whether each feeling is only a group of internal sensations and whether there are, additionally, proper emotional elements *sui generis* (what German psychologists refer to as "Gefühlstone"), we have concluded that each feeling is complex and there are no feelings without experiencing internal sensations. If the weakening and modification of self-consciousness in pathological cases depends on internal hypoesthesia and paresthesia, we should not be surprised that weakened internal sensations, especially organic ones, not only suppress consciousness of life and self but also reduce emotional intensity. Admittedly, patients whose self-consciousness has changed and weakened do sometimes have outbursts of anger or become suddenly anxious. We often read about such violent emotions, most notably in Krishaber's descriptions. However, this does not mean that the explanation of patients' apathy I have just given is wrong or that the relationship between self-consciousness and emotivity does not exist, the reason being that the condition of these patients keeps changing while paresthesia and hypoesthesia are not fixed but subject to fluctuations and modifications. In the case of Aleksandra, weaker consciousness of life and self as well as her general apathy were constant and uniform because her organic hypoesthesia continued unchanged for several consecutive years. The same can be said of Sollier's patient and others.

Almost all stronger feelings augment consciousness of the self while only some of them suppress or eclipse it. Self-consciousness is strengthened specifically by feelings such as joy, anger and impatience, which used to be referred to as sthenic affects; on the other hand, dejection, lack of volition and passive apathetic sadness have a negative and completely opposite effect. When he studied feelings present in melancholy and cyclic psychosis, G. Dumas observed that all vegetative functions get weaker during periods of dejection, becoming livelier and more intensive at moments of joyous exultation and acute moral suffering. At times of passive sadness and dejection the heart rate is weaker, breathing slows down and peripheral blood vessels narrow. According to Dumas, many patients going through periods of dejection and sadness present symptoms very similar to depersonalization. For example, patients sometimes say "It is all over now, everything has

changed, I live in a different world". A certain melancholiac would use the following words: "I see everything as if clouded by a mist. Neither I nor objects are what they used to be". In such cases, we may assume in all probability that consciousness of life and self was temporarily changed and weakened. Sensitivity tests carried out at times of melancholic dejection showed weakened responsivity to pain and touch as well as diminished sensation in the muscles and mucous membranes. Conversely, Dumas found out that, in patients suffering from cyclic psychosis, sensitivity to all external and internal impulses was much subtler during moments of joyful excitation than when they were sad. If livelier and stronger feelings highlight the sensation of the "self", it is most likely because they are linked to a general excitation of living functions accompanied by stronger internal sensations. Dejection and passive sadness reduce the intensity of all physiological functions which include internal sensations, thus suppressing consciousness of life and self.

Dugas, whose views on the self and depersonalization I do not share, also observed that dejection is related to a weakened sense of life. Unlike myself, the author does not equate self-consciousness with consciousness of life. Still, I want to quote a characteristic fragment of his article:

Who has not experienced moments of dejection and moral dullness when the objects and beings in our surroundings do not provoke the usual feelings, even though life continues apparently unchanged. At such moments, physical and mental functions are not suspended, but the living and affective disposition (*ton vital et affectif*) can weaken, bordering on total apathy. Depersonalization is a condition of this type – it is a mental disorder caused by moral (emotional) atony. (Dugas, 1898, p. 503)

Because strong feelings enhance self-consciousness thanks to the organic sensations that always come with them, we should expect the self to become more pronounced in situations in which such intense feelings are experienced. Indeed, this is what happens in dreams, when the feelings we experience are generally stronger than in our waking hours, when we are engaged in our everyday activities. A normal person can go on for days or weeks without an opportunity to get angry or scared and there are sometimes long periods of time when people neither despair nor get carried away with enthusiasm or joy. We sometimes experience more strong feelings when dreaming in the course of one night than we do over several days of our real waking existence. In our dreams, feelings are less subtle and diverse, but more violent and frequent than when we are awake. It is due to this domination of powerful feelings that dreams are so extraordinarily egocentric. The egotism of dreams is thus explained by the somatological hypothesis of the self.

Not only dreams, but also some states of excitement when we are awake seem to demonstrate that strong feelings, and so, indirectly, internal sensations, enhance self-consciousness. It is commonly known that drinking small quantities of alcohol intensifies our feelings and people are usually cheerful when inebriated, a fact illustrated by different proverbial sayings such as: “Bonum vinum laetificat cor hominum”. We also know that alcohol intoxication stimulates blood circulation, breathing and oxidation processes in body tissues. We may therefore assume that, *ceteris paribus*, organic sensations are stronger under such conditions than in normal circumstances. If feelings, and, by extension, organic sensations, are amplified by small amounts of alcohol, we should expect that self-consciousness will be augmented as well. It seems that this intuition is corroborated by evidence and a slightly drunk person does indeed have a more distinct sense of self than a person who is sober. We find this confirmed not only by introspection, but also when listening to conversations between people who are a little drunk: such people talk about themselves and their plans, memories and beliefs to a greater extent and more often. They are also more preoccupied with themselves than before drinking. It seems therefore that human consciousness at times of excitement is more egotist compared to normal circumstances. Some years ago, I knew a shop assistant who went to Professor Mendel’s polyclinic in Berlin for consultation. At the time, Janet’s studies were not yet known, and the patient was diagnosed as a regular neurasthenic. The man presented various symptoms which Janet would certainly have recognized as symptoms of psychasthenia. He said he could not see clearly, even though no objective pathological changes of refraction were found, and that he sometimes has feelings of dissociation, as if there was another person inside him. I admit I do not remember the details of this patient’s condition, but I do have a vivid memory of him telling me once that his ailment subsided for a time and the feeling of the apparent dissociation of the self disappeared after drinking several glasses of beer. His case seems to confirm that self-consciousness is enhanced under the influence of alcohol because, as I have already mentioned, the apparent dissociation of the self in psychasthenics is probably only a symptom of an abnormal weakening of self-consciousness (see pp. 77–82).

I have already compared consciousness of life and self to a clouded background against which other mental facts occur. The background is always the same, but there are moments when it is brighter and more distinct or, alternatively, more dimmed and opaque. As most feelings augment self-consciousness whilst reduced emotivity, dejection and passive, apathetic sadness suppress it, it seems that the self is in a state of near continuous, minor oscillation, meaning that the intensity and distinctness of this mental fact change and fluctuate almost unceasingly. Even though these changes and

oscillations are usually negligible in normal people, we have all experienced times when our self-consciousness is clearer than at other moments.

When we think, our attention is always focused to a greater or lesser extent. It has already been mentioned that attention is a complex mental process which, besides the sensation of muscular tension, also encompasses certain feelings. Most probably, these attention-related feelings—and perhaps to an extent muscular sensations—enhance self-consciousness, which tends to be sharper when we think than at times of dejection, when our attention slackens and gets weaker. However, we may talk about enhanced self-consciousness during moments of attention as long as attention intensity does not exceed certain limits. I have mentioned the case of mystics during contemplation—moments of excessively focused, hypertrophic attention—whose self-consciousness most likely disappears all together. People who are deep in thought or preoccupied with observing an object may temporarily lose their sense of self or, at any rate, be less conscious of the self than at times of average attention intensity. Attention always narrows down the scope of consciousness and, when at its most intense, brings consciousness to a state close to monoideism. At such moments of excessive focus of consciousness, self-consciousness becomes blurred or, in some cases, may disappear completely as the organic sensations providing its foundation are moved to the subconscious or even cease to exist.

When some representations occur as motives of desires and are linked with strong emotions, self-consciousness is usually augmented and highlighted. Naturally, what I mean here is conscious desires that have not yet become automatic. The enhancement of self-consciousness at times of wanting and attention, as long as the latter does not go beyond certain limits of intensity, probably depends on feelings or rather the internal sensations linked with them. We may also expect that muscular sensations, inseparable from wanting and attention, contribute in some way to highlighting self-consciousness.

I have given many examples demonstrating that self-consciousness is not absolutely fixed and unchangeable. Citing different types of pathological cases, I have concluded that the self may change to a certain extent not only in terms of clarity and distinctness but sometimes even in terms of its quality. After all, each normal person may attest from experience that self-consciousness is sometimes more clouded, whereas at other times it gains in lucidity and sharpness. Although such changes and fluctuations are relatively small in healthy people, their very existence is enough to refute the common belief about the alleged, absolute unchangeability of the self. Therefore, the self is not a perfectly fixed fact which is always exactly the same throughout the conscious existence of an individual from childhood

to death. Confronted with pathologies and introspective observation of normal people, the proponents of the theory about the absolute unchangeability of the self are left with only one option: to deny the facts. Pathological cases, however, are too numerous, too precisely described and too well established to be challenged, especially as many of the patients belong to intellectual circles, their integrity providing every guarantee that the statements they make are honest and true. If self-consciousness in pathological cases changes to some extent, if we can observe its slight oscillation even in normal people, and, finally, if there are different degrees or even different qualitative shades of self-consciousness in one and the same person, it would be difficult to assume that the self is a metaphysical, noumenal entity. We do not know anything about such hypothetical, metaphysical entities—much less can we talk about changes to their distinctness and quality. Hence, we must admit that, similarly to any other mental fact, self-consciousness represents empirical content. In other words, the self—like feelings, desires, representations, etc.—is a given fact.

It seems reasonable to ask who or what is the fact given to? The question itself, however, is wrongly phrased as no mental content is given to a being which would cause this content to exist, become conscious and be precisely what it is at a given moment. To say that mental content is given is only to express the fact of its conscious existence. It does not mean that there is an entity that brings it into being or endows it with consciousness. Some mental content is given often, other less so, but the self is given continuously and always, if we do not take account of the relatively rare cases of selfless states. Joy, sadness as well as some representations and mental images are given temporarily and may last for longer or shorter periods of time, whereas self-consciousness is given unceasingly and at all times, which means that it co-exists with sadness, joy or different representations. To an extent, disputes among psychologists as to whether the self is or is not given probably emerged because the self is always indistinct and opaque. However, a low degree of consciousness of certain content does not change it in any significant way and has no effect on the very fact of its direct, conscious existence. Self-consciousness is indistinct and opaque because the internal sensations on which it is founded are also weak, indistinct and poorly diversified in terms of quality.

It is often said that mental facts are “given to the self” (“dem Ich gegeben”). What can this mean? When I close my eyes or find myself in a totally dark room, I have before me a dark visual field against which I can see brighter bands, spots or stripes that are constantly changing. These visual sensations exist; they are conscious and given. But is it my “self” that makes the visual field dark? Is it the empirical self that sees this visual field and gives these

mental images the quality they currently have? If it is indeed so, we should assume that the images are not dark or bright in themselves, but that the self makes them such and such. Now, sensations which would not be what they are at a given moment but which would acquire certain qualities through some mysterious, completely unknown “fiat” of the empirical self would not be anything at all. When one listens to music, it would be hard to assume that it is one’s self that causes the tones to be precisely as one can currently hear them. After all, it is not empirical self-consciousness that makes us enjoy a minuet by Paderewski and link our auditory sensations with some feelings. Cases of selfless consciousness suggest that mental facts may and do exist even though self-consciousness is momentarily absent. Let us recollect the description of the mental state of a person gradually regaining consciousness after fainting or the hysteric Leonia in a state of catalepsy. If sensations, representations and mental images exist in such cases, although the self does not, these mental facts are given without being given to some totally unknown being which some philosophers have decided to call the self. Self-consciousness itself is empirical just like all other mental facts, so there is no reason we should assume that it may exist only when it is given to a being which is conscious of the self or acknowledges it. If the empirical self was given to a being, this unknown being would also have to be given to something, presumably a different, totally unknown self. This would be a case of an infinite regress of unknown selves given to and becoming mutually conscious of each other. Hence, the self is an empirical fact that exists and is conscious and given, just like all other mental facts.

If the self is a given, empirical, mental fact, it cannot want, believe or think to the extent that we understand wanting, believing and thinking as activities or functions of the self. Neither can it experience or feel anything. Should the self believe and want in the sense of some actions on “its” part, it would be simultaneously passive and active. Let us imagine Peter or Paul solving trigonometric problems. If it is Peter’s self that thinks about sines and cosines, it is active and passive at the same time as, while looking at the white paper of his notebook, Peter experiences visual sensations and can hear the sound of voices in the street and the rattle of carts going by. Yet, it is difficult to imagine mental content which would be passive and active concurrently. If the self paid attention, wanted or thought, we should expect it to become more distinct during “its” activities. In fact, however, the opposite is true, as has been demonstrated by the many provided examples (a mystic in ecstasy, a scholar engrossed in his studies etc.). On top of this, in our dreams, when the will gets weaker and attention is almost totally gone, self-consciousness does get clearer than at moments of intense mental activity, therefore we may conclude that the self is not “res cogitans” because everyone will admit that apart from those rare dreams that are logically

coherent, dreams are so empty, nonsensical and boring that thoughtful parents usually do not allow their children to recount them out of respect for listeners' patience. Therefore, the self does not pay attention, want, learn or experience. Mental facts exist, are conscious and directly given together with this most constant and least changeable matter which we call the self, but they are not given either because of or to the self. When we talk about experiencing sensations or feelings, we should understand these expressions as the mere fact of their existence or co-existence with self-consciousness.

Even though the empirical self is not active in the sense of some characteristic function or activity, we cannot deny that it is very often considered to be active by philosophers and non-philosophers alike. What does it mean exactly to say "I feel active at the moment?". The mere existence of any sensations, feelings or representations at a given moment is not enough to call this or that state of consciousness active. It would be difficult to say of someone who, having learnt about a tragedy, is worried and sad, that this person is active at this point in time. Similarly, I will not say that I am active when my neighbor's house is struck by lightning and I am suddenly scared. I am active, or rather feel activity, when I sense an effort, that is when I focus my attention, think intensively or perform physical work. To the best of our knowledge, each sensation of an effort—be it mechanical work of the muscles or mental exertion—is of peripheral origin, which is to say that it is primarily a certain group of sensations and images of muscular tension. Most likely, feelings also play some role in this sensation of effort, which is essentially nothing more than a sensation of activity felt to a greater degree. If we restrict our analysis only to the feeling of mental effort, we may say that particularly those sensations which correspond to the tension of facial, forehead and torso muscles as well as the muscles of auxiliary sensory organs, especially the eyes and ears, provide the basic foundation for the sensation of effort and activity. As likely as not, images of muscular sensations also play a part. Should it be possible for a man to live completely paralyzed and anesthetized with all kinesthetic images completely absent, we could expect that this man would not have any sensation of activity.

Supposing this explanation of the sensation of activity is correct, it still does not explain why people believe their own "selves" to be active. Nonetheless, it might shed light on where the belief about the activity of the self originated and how it spread. Although organic sensations corresponding to vegetative functions provide the foundation for consciousness of life and self, muscular sensations and their related images also contribute to self-consciousness; for example, respiratory sensations are mainly felt as contractions of the diaphragm and respiratory muscles. In all likelihood, the

sensations accompanying the contraction of and tension in other muscle groups also have a role to play. So, there are certain common elements—namely some muscular sensations—shared by self-consciousness and the sensation of activity and effort. This is why the sensation of activity sharpens self-consciousness at moments of attention and wanting. Let us add that organic sensations related to feelings in the so-called active states of consciousness also contribute to making the self more pronounced. It is quite possible that the self is believed to be active because it becomes more distinct in response to the sensation of activity.

I believe, however, that there is another reason which helps to understand why people think of the self as active. As we know, self-consciousness is relatively permanent. Not only is it given at the moment of the present sensation of activity, but also as an image of the self in memories, especially if these do not refer too far back. Memories often not only represent some past events, but sometimes reconstruct, more or less accurately, a general, past state of consciousness, including consciousness of the self, as I have already described in more detail. This permanent self—existing at the present moment and often given as part of a memory related to experiences of yesterday, the day before etc.—is regarded as a permanent, unchangeable cause of current thoughts, desires and beliefs. The self is considered to be an active cause on the basis of the principle “post hoc ergo propter hoc” which people apply continuously in their everyday lives. This would make the belief about the alleged activities of the self nothing but a secondary interpretation, an effect of a misapplied and misunderstood principle of causality. We may therefore say that the self is considered to be active, first, because it is usually augmented by the sensation of activity, and second, possibly because the permanence and presence of the self, as an image, in many memories makes people treat it as an active, permanent cause of their desires, beliefs and thoughts.

Psychological textbooks or publications about the self sometimes say that all conscious facts have a certain property in common and that it is not possible to describe or define it with any precision. They also mention that this property is expressed by the possessive pronoun “my”; in other words, representations, desires, feelings etc. are “mine”. It is also said that mental facts are “mine” precisely because the self exists. The pronoun “my”, when used to refer to mental aspects, has several different meanings which I must examine here.

Let us assume there is a man living on a desert island where even animals are absent and that this man has totally forgotten about the existence of other living, thinking, and feeling beings. Most probably, the recluse would never consider thoughts, representations or feelings to be “his”. It is said

that Kaspar Hauser, “aenigma sui temporis” as we can read on his tombstone, grew up in circumstances similar to the ones I have just described: living alone in prison since childhood, he did not know anything about people. It is also reported that a mysterious, invisible hand would regularly give him his daily bread. Hauser’s story is used here as an example and we are obviously not interested whether it is authentic. Neither Hauser nor the fictitious man living on a desert island would consider mental facts to be “theirs” just as they would not treat the physical objects around them as their property. We may regard mental phenomena as “ours” as long as we know or suspect that there are other consciousnesses which are not known directly. It does not matter at all what types of consciousness we mean here—whether they are human or animal psyches or even the non-existing consciousnesses of the sun, stars, rocks, stones etc. The expressions “my sadness”, “my vision”, “my feeling” mean something when opposed to other feelings, representations or thoughts that we assume to exist, which means that mental facts are “mine” in relation to “your”, “his” and “their” experiences. Hence, the word “my” denotes, first of all, the conceived relation of directly given mental content to other mental content whose existence is rightly, or sometimes wrongly, assumed. It follows that the meaning of the word “my” is the product of people’s co-existence in families, tribes or clans, or their contact with other beings considered to be conscious; put simply, it results from social circumstances and the environment where an individual develops.

Even though neither Hauser nor the fictitious inhabitant of a desert island would have any idea that mental facts are consciously “theirs”, it is difficult to suppose that they would have no sense of life and self because the self does not depend on social circumstances or the existence of several or many human or animal individuals. Rather, much like colors, tones and smells, it is an expression of the psychophysical structure of each person. Granted, it would not be possible for them to think that the self is “theirs” and the concept we express when we say “my self” would not exist in their specific situations, but both Hauser and the recluse would feel that they were alive; they would feel the relatively permanent something we refer to by the first person singular pronoun. Within the meaning discussed so far, the word “my” does not denote a property or quality of mental facts depending on self-consciousness, but only a conceived relation existing insofar as we suppose or know that there are other consciousnesses apart from the one that is given directly and known in itself.

Perhaps the word “my” used to refer to mental facts means that people endow their own “selves” with some power over representations, feelings and desires? Thus understood, the representation of Socrates would be “mine”

because the self allegedly thinks about Socrates just as it can think about Napoleon or the theory of gravity. Undoubtedly, people do sometimes understand the word “my” in this way, but it seems that this understanding is wrong as the self, being an empirical fact itself, cannot govern or create other mental facts. The self does not want desire, sadness or joy because it does not want anything: desires, representations and feelings are given just as the self is given. The belief about the alleged power or dominance of the self over other empirical facts might have originated with people considering the self to be a permanent and active cause behind mental facts for reasons I have tried to explain.

Apart from the conceived relation of directly given content to other content whose existence is only assumed and—apart from the false belief that mental facts are „mine” because the self has power over them—the word “my” may have yet another meaning, namely the very fact that sensations, desires, feelings etc. are always given together with self-consciousness and that almost every directly given state of consciousness encompasses the self. When I look at Mont-Blanc or when I am sad having received news of an illness affecting a dear friend, I usually do not give much thought to the fact that the visual representation of a mountain or the feeling of sadness is “my” experience. Sadness may change into joy when I get a telegram with the news that the illness was false, and the visual representation of the mountain may fade when I look the other way into the Chamonix valley, but the self always remains the same even though other mental facts have changed. This co-existence or simultaneity of relatively permanent self-consciousness and other constantly changing mental facts may be expressed by using the pronoun “my”, but the pronoun does not mean at all that the self leaves its mark on mental content or brands it. My memory of yesterday’s walk does not become different because it is considered to be “mine”, just as a book sitting on a bookseller’s shelf does not change after I have paid five crowns for it, even though the transaction has made it “mine”. Therefore, the expressions “my feeling”, “my thoughts”, “my mental images” etc. mean that these facts are directly given and that they are, strictly speaking, “experiences” (“Erlebnisse”) in that they are connected with consciousness of life, i.e. the self, which provides, as it were, their general and permanent yet always dimmed background.

The word “my” used to refer to mental facts may thus have two different meanings: a) it expresses a certain conceived relation resulting from social circumstances and b) it may also denote the co-existence of the self with all mental facts in general. Hereinafter, whenever I talk about “my” mental facts, I will be using the word “my” in the latter meaning.

All memories and mental images are experiences of an individual and are “his” mental facts because they co-exist with consciousness of life and self. Referring to his stay in Paris, an accident which happened to an acquaintance or the defense of his doctoral thesis, X may say that all past facts are “his” memories and fragments of “his” past. However, all these memories, co-existing with self-consciousness, are not “his” in the same way. Some of them are part of “his own” past whereas others refer to the past of other people and, while still being “his” memories, are not “his own” memories. Let us now consider the difference between “his own” memories and those which we referred to simply as “his” memories. Why does X usually not confuse these two types of experiences and why does he know that it was not he but his friend who had an accident or was in Madrid ten years ago?

Let us suppose that, at a given moment, self-consciousness co-exists with the memory of the wedding march from *Lohengrin* as well as images of the interior, actors and boxes of the Vienna opera. This memory is neither separate nor isolated from other memories as it comes with other unclear images of the hotel, cab ride to the opera and the ticket office. These are followed by the consecutive memories of the dinner after the performance, the way back home, a bad night etc. The memories of going to Vienna and coming back to Kraków emerge as if from a thick fog. The bright memory of being at the opera is surrounded by many other faded memories related to events which either preceded or followed the performance. It is of less importance whether these memories also included the image of self-consciousness. The main point is that memories of different intensity are represented as a continuous series without any major gaps or breaks. Obviously, the series does not recreate all mental facts that existed as conscious content present during, before and after the stay at the opera. Still, it is usually not broken by any gaps. If a person recollecting the melody from *Lohengrin* has a well-developed visual memory, the series is linked to an unclear image of his body or face. But it might also be that the person’s visual memory is poor, in which case, instead of a visual image, the series would be accompanied by an unclear auditory image of a name or surname. Finally, for some people, the role served by visual or auditory images is fulfilled by motor images of sensations corresponding to the functions of speech organs when uttering a name or surname. Continuous series of memories, co-existing with current self-consciousness and some relatively permanent visual, auditory or motor images, are part of a person’s past—they are fragments of “his own past”. Thus, when I say that something happened to me last year, it should be understood to mean that there is a series of memories accumulated around one clear recollection and that the series is linked to an unclear representation of my face or figure. All these memories, together with

the image of my face or figure, co-existing with current consciousness of life and self, are part of “my own past”.

If some series of memories co-exist with current self-consciousness but are accompanied by the visual image of a different body or the auditory or motor image of a different name or surname, the memories are still “mine” but are a fragment of another person’s past known only to me. Such memories are “mine”, but not “my own”. It should be noted that these series are shorter than the series of memories which are part of “my own” past. “My own” memories are different from “my” memories in that the relatively permanent, combined (visual, auditory or motor) image of “my” memories is one thing, and the relatively permanent image of “my own” memories is quite another.

If, as has been said, the self does not want, desire, think about or pay attention to anything, what is the meaning behind verbs in the first person singular and such statements as, for example, “I see”, “I believe”, “I feel”, “I think” or “I want”? My aim is not to engage in a psychological analysis of the processes of seeing, believing, thinking, wanting etc., as this would call for a psychology textbook. I only want to establish the meaning that sensation of the self has in these states of consciousness.

The statement “I see a lamp” means that some visual sensations are associated with subconscious images of previous, similar sensations, that there is a simultaneous sensation of activity and that all these more or less conscious mental facts are linked to self-consciousness which is given but always dimmed. All these mental facts constitute what we call seeing, i.e. perception, expressed in this case by the statement “I see a lamp”.

“I pay attention to the lamp” means almost the same as “I see a lamp” because a person who looks at something usually also pays attention to the object. The words “pay attention” mean that the sensation of activity or effort is more pronounced than in the previous case. The statement “I imagine Napoleon” does not mean that the self searches for certain representations, conjures, “imagines” and thinks about them, but that certain groups of visual images representing the emperor at a certain stage of his life and in a certain posture are currently given just as self-consciousness is given. The fact that such representations sometimes evoke feelings and physiological reactions, i.e. organic sensations, and that these feelings may be very different—strong or weak, pleasant or unpleasant—is basically of no consequence because it is not the self that evokes or experiences them. Existing simultaneously with self-consciousness, these mental facts, which can be differentiated as certain instances of seeing, paying attention or imagining, are precisely the psychological processes expressed by such sentences as “I

see”, “I pay attention to something” or “I imagine Napoleon”. By no means does the self see, pay attention or evoke certain representations by virtue of some activity which would be proper only to itself. Mental facts are conscious in themselves, not because the self decided to endow them with consciousness. The self does not create attention and attention does not pick up some mental images or sensations: the self, attention and representations are all given. We cannot understand statements like “I am sad” or “I feel sad” to mean that the self experiences or feels sadness. The feeling of sadness is sad in itself and it does not become so because the self gave it a certain quality. “I feel sad” means only that some representations and feelings are given simultaneously with self-consciousness.

But what does it mean to say “I think”? The words “thought” and “think” denote so many different psychological processes and can have such a multitude of different meanings that to be able to answer this question we would first have to find a general definition of thinking. In the most general terms, we might say that thinking is a representation of a relationship associated with the sensation of activity or effort in the form of attention. If the metal image of the relationship $\text{sine}^2 \alpha + \text{cosine}^2 \alpha = 1$ was repeated three, four or ten times, by the eleventh time the sensation of activity would be much weaker than when the representation of this relationship became conscious for the first time. In fact, we may only talk about thinking when the sensation of activity reaches a certain degree of intensity. If thinking is a representation of a relationship, we should ask about a definition of relationships. Although the question is very important not only logically but also psychologically, it does not fall within the scope of psychology of the self as the self is not an active being creating or establishing relationships. Self-consciousness does not imagine through some activity of its own that the angles in a triangle add up to 180° . Hence, “I think” means that consciousness of the self, activities and certain representations of relationships exist now as conscious content.

Naturally, the self that does not believe or think cannot be a knowing subject as long as we understand cognition to mean the result of some kind of activity proper to the self. By the same token, the self, thus understood, cannot be a subject that is wanting, attentive or perceiving. Should we therefore conclude that we would need to assume the existence of a noumenal, wanting and knowing subject? If this noumenal subject exists, it cannot be conceived of otherwise than in terms of a certain relationship to the content of cognition, for example to the representation that all angles in a triangle add up to 180° . However, we may only talk about a relationship when both of its elements are known or at least defined in some way. When I say that Peter

is similar to Paul, Podgórze is close to Kraków or March is longer than February, relationship elements are known and defined in each of these judgments. But we cannot say anything about a noumenal, knowing subject. Nor can it be defined in any way as mere hypothetical existence is not an attribute or property. The relationship between the knowing subject and the object of cognition would thus be a relationship for which only one element is known because we can neither know nor say anything about the other and a relationship with only one known element is not a relationship at all. So, it is difficult to agree with the view whereby the existence of a noumenal, knowing subject is a necessary and unavoidable hypothesis.

There are certain objections which can be raised against such claims. It could be said, for example, that the very concept of the knowing, metaphysical subject contains not only its hypothetical existence but also the ability or activity or cognition and that this noumenal subject is accepted *a priori* as existing and knowing. A being which exists and knows has some quality or attribute, namely the ability or activity of cognition. Hence, the concept of the metaphysical, knowing subject would be defined to a certain extent and could serve as an element in a conceived relationship. We need to counter this by saying that the ability of cognition is not a property or definition, but a simple assertion that cognition exists as an empirical fact at different moments in time. If this was opposed by saying that the attribute of a metaphysical subject is not the ability but the activity of cognition, we would respond that an activity which is totally different from all other activities known from experience should not deserve to be called an activity. It would rather be something completely unknown because, after all, it does not seem that the activity of cognition, allegedly proper to the noumenal subject, is the empirical sensation of activity given in attention and wanting. Thus, we cannot think about the noumenal subject as having any properties as mere hypothetical existence is neither an attribute nor a definition. By the same token, it is not possible to think about such a subject in relation to mental facts representing a kind of cognition.

It seems that yet another objection might be that, in this case, we must not talk of a metaphysical relationship between the subject and certain content if this noumenal being is not given; in other words, the knowing subject may exist even though it is not related to any known facts. This argument can also be refuted. If we must not imagine the metaphysical subject as related to the known facts and if the subject does not have any properties known from experience, then we cannot think about it at all. Still, people reportedly do think about this noumenal, knowing subject and accept its existence. How can we think about the noumenal subject? Is it known through some intuition? However, an intuition representing a metaphysical subject does

not exist because representing something would have to be a conscious and thus empirically given fact, even though some intuition made it known. If the metaphysical subject was given through intuition it would be a metaphysical being and an empirical, conscious fact at the same time. A metaphysical being that would also be an empirical, mental fact, would not be anything but an empty word. The alleged concept of the noumenal, knowing subject is not a concept at all, but only an image of certain words or sounds such as a square circle or a concave convexity. If the metaphysical subject is not known and cannot even be conceived of or approached intuitively in any way, it does not follow that it does not exist. After all, it is possible that there are certain beings that are absolutely intangible and inaccessible to thought. Science, however, cannot deal with beings of which we know in advance that they can never be known or conceived of, even though they exist.

The existence of mental content is a final fact beyond which no process of thinking can go as thinking itself is also a mental fact. Any hypotheses attempting to explain consciousness as a manifestation of some noumenal foundation may only claim dogmatically that the foundation exists, but they are not able to say anything about it. Whether we call this hypothetical substrate the noumenal self, metaphysical subject or substantial soul, is basically of no importance as this transcendent being cannot be described in any way and all attempts to do so must necessarily resort to negative statements. Obviously, statements that are only negative are not statements at all.

Attempts to explain mental facts on the basis of the hypothesis about the existence of a metaphysical subject or a substantial soul are much closer to the materialistic view than it might appear. The reason is that both hypotheses assume a foundation of consciousness, so both claim that consciousness is not a final fact but a manifestation of some being. For metaphysicians of materialism, consciousness is a symptom of mechanical processes unfolding in matter. Materialism considers these mechanical processes as existing as such and in themselves regardless of whether they have been the content of some consciousness. Proponents of the theory about the substantial soul either acknowledge that this substantial being is unknown or endow it with qualities borrowed from experience, i.e. from physical facts. Thus, both theories agree about the essentials as, from their perspective, consciousness is not the final, fundamental fact but rather a manifestation of some indefinite substrate. Given that, in reality, both the matter and the spiritual substance are metaphysical beings which one cannot say anything about apart from their hypothetical existence, both metaphysical views are very close to each other—the difference between them lies mainly

in words. According to one theory, the substrate should be called the substantial soul whereas the other would have it called the matter. Both the matter and the substantial soul are really just frameworks or, as it were, empty forms of concepts which did, however, make great contributions to natural sciences and psychology at a certain stage of their development. Even though they still may have some didactic and pedagogical value, they are not genuine logical concepts because concepts which do not have any known attributes are only words devoid of any meaning. In fact, both metaphysical theories are modifications of agnosticism despite the fact that they both try to combat it. In the materialistic approach, consciousness is a manifestation or an epiphenomenon of the matter about which materialism does not know anything, its dogmatic assertions notwithstanding. For the theory of the substantial soul, mental facts are basically also manifestations or epiphenomena of an equally unknown spiritual substance.

The expressions “knowing subject” and “known object” do not cease to be verbal symbols of real concepts just because one rejects metaphysical views on the noumenal subject as they can be understood in a different way, namely as a relationship between certain means and the achieved goal. It is possible to consider cognition as a goal while thoughts and observations preceding and enabling it can be regarded as means to its achievement. Without getting into the psychological analysis of the thinking process itself, I want to repeat that thoughts are not thoughts of the self in the sense of cause and effect. Neither are they activities, emanations or attributes of the self. Representations of relationships, judgments and concepts linked to the sensation of activity are “my” thoughts because they are given with self-consciousness and occur simultaneously with it. These thoughts, together with self-consciousness, which is related to them and provides, as it were, their relatively permanent background, could be considered to be the knowing subject. The object could be cognition itself, i.e. a certain judgment or concept, as long as this judgment or concept is considered abstractly, without concurrent self-consciousness, as existing in itself. For example, we are given a triangle with angles α , β , γ , and an external angle δ contiguous to angle γ . The total of angles $\alpha + \beta + \gamma = \gamma + \delta$, $-\gamma = -\gamma$, so $\alpha + \beta = \delta$. These three equations are judgments, representations of relationships, or, in other words, thoughts. If the first two judgments ($\alpha + \beta + \gamma = \gamma + \delta$, $-\gamma = -\gamma$) are represented as “my” thoughts linked to self-consciousness, they can be understood to be the knowing subject; the resulting equation $\alpha + \beta = \delta$ would be the known object if it was presented in itself, excluding self-consciousness. However, the knowing subject does not necessarily have to be a reminder of all “my” thoughts which are elements in some complex reasoning or long argument. The subject is constituted only by “my” judgment that certain thoughts which are logically linked to cognition are precisely

“mine”. We could understand the concept of the wanting subject in a similar way. The mental image of the goal to be achieved is the object of wanting as long as we do not consider this goal as “my own”. The wanting subject is “my” wanting, i.e. wanting co-existing with self-consciousness. In the same way, we might understand self-consciousness together with attention to be the perceiving subject, while representation could be understood as the object.

But there is also the feeling subject. Again, the feeling subject would be self-consciousness and “my” feelings of sadness or joy, whilst the object of feeling would be some mental image or representation considered abstractly as if self-consciousness was not given simultaneously with it. In this case, self-consciousness and “my” sadness following news of a friend’s illness would be the feeling subject, its object being the very mental image of the ill person.

The subject must by no means be understood as a being existing outside our conscious states—a being which perceives and acknowledges observations, desires, feelings and thoughts. The perceiving, thinking, wanting or feeling subject is always only an abstract concept, an isolate of empirical consciousness of the self and some other mental content, as opposed to a mental image or representation which, understood as existing without simultaneous self-consciousness, is the object of cognition, wanting, thinking or feeling.

* * *

Concluding these remarks, I must present and discuss two objections which the reader is bound to raise against the somatological hypothesis of the self. In my opinion, both are grave and important and so deserve a few words of comment.

1.

We may ask why the self becomes less pronounced when we focus our attention on it. If self-consciousness is empirical like all the other mental facts, it is difficult to understand why it does not get any clearer when focused on and why, unlike other mental facts, it is never at the center of lucid consciousness. In this book, I have only acknowledged this mysterious phenomenon and looked for its confirmation in cases of psychasthenia that represent symptoms of depersonalization. We have learned that, in such patients, the weakening of self-consciousness was usually stronger when they engaged in introspective analysis. I will now try to explain this paradox.

If, as I believe, the sensation of life—the self—subsumes the totality of little diversified internal sensations bringing to mind similar mental images, then we can assume in advance that this entire group of images and sensations cannot be clearly conscious at one moment and in one act of attention, as, at a given moment, lucid consciousness cannot encompass all these weak sensations providing the foundation for self-consciousness. Strictly speaking, we cannot talk of paying attention to self-consciousness because the process would mean becoming simultaneously and lucidly conscious of all internal sensations which correspond to physiological functions of the body. Weak organic sensations are too numerous to be the object of lucid consciousness at the same time and remain at the center of consciousness at any given moment. I believe that the weakening or partial disappearance of the self at times when it is the focus of intense attention are just manifestations of the fact that lucid consciousness can never encompass all elements of sensation on which the self is founded.

In a way, this supposition is confirmed by introspective observation. As attention paid to self-consciousness gets more and more intense, the latter becomes more vague while internal sensations are far clearer than they were a moment before, when attention was directed at a mental image. Not only do I experience muscular sensations and the sensation of activity, but I also become relatively clearly conscious of respiratory sensations and even the beating of my heart, which I locate imprecisely in the left part of my chest. I also feel something like a contraction in my throat and chest which probably corresponds to the narrowing of the glottis (*rimae glottidis*) and the resulting difficulty in breathing. We should remember that the expressions such as “I feel muscular, respiratory sensations” etc. do not mean that they are felt by the self, but that they are directly given and are now more pronounced than they were before. It might therefore seem that what appears to be paying attention to self-consciousness is in fact nothing more than becoming aware of some internal sensations which get clearer one by one. The probable reason for which self-consciousness weakens and partly disappears is that, by elevating only some sensational groups, one after another, to the level of lucid consciousness, the entire undiversified complex of weak and subconscious images, i.e. the very elements constituting self-consciousness become disintegrated and disjointed.

I have already mentioned that some psychologists do not consider the self to be empirical and given, probably because it is always dimmed and poorly conscious. Their belief might also be explained by one more circumstance. Considering that under conditions in which representations and mental images usually become clearer, i.e. self-consciousness gets even more blurred when we pay attention to them, those psychologists do not want to regard

the self as a given mental fact. If this was indeed their reasoning, we might respond that self-consciousness is not the only mental fact which fades away as a result of focusing attention. As I have said before, the same happens to feelings and affections when our attention is directed at them (see pp. 46, 47). I will not, however, discuss this destructive impact of attention on feelings here as this would exceed the limits of this publication.

2.

The somatological hypothesis can be countered with the following arguments. If internal sensations provide the basis for consciousness of life and self, this consciousness should be augmented whenever internal physiological functions are generally excited as the growing intensity of internal impulses should be accompanied with a rise in the intensity of their corresponding sensations. Although there are no states in which all physiological functions would be evenly and simultaneously excited, there are moments when some internal organs work harder and more intensively compared to other periods. Let us consider a man in energetic movement or during intensive physical work. His heart beat will be stronger, his breathing will quicken and the processes of oxidation in the tissues will be accelerated compared to moments of relative rest. It might be that on these occasions the sense of life and self is sometimes clearer than it was at moments of rest, when some internal physiological functions were slower and weaker; however, we still cannot say, without exposing ourselves to ridicule, that self-consciousness becomes always and permanently pronounced during physical work. Yet it would seem that this is the conclusion of the somatological hypothesis.

In response to this objection against our hypothesis, we can say that the degree of clarity of internal sensations does not depend only on the intensity of impulses, but also, and to a large extent, on other circumstances such as, primarily, the degree to which the field of consciousness is focused. We know of several forms of this focus. In normal people, they may be most often observed at times of intense attention; in pathological cases, there may be other forms unrelated to the sensation of activity or effort. I have already provided one such example when citing Janet to describe the automatic activities of the hysteric Leonia in a cataleptic state. At times of focus, lucid consciousness may not encompass organic sensations, even when they are accompanied by relatively strong internal physiological impulses. A hungry man forgets his hunger when he gets news that absorbs his attention. Thirst and tiredness become more bearable under such circumstances, yet the intensity of internal impulses has not changed at all just because some representations and mental images became lucidly conscious for a moment. The

sensations of hunger, thirst or tiredness do not cease to exist as physical facts but are pushed into the background of consciousness and become blurred when, for example, a hungry hunter notices fox traces in the snow and starts following them with focused attention. Such representations fill the field of lucid consciousness, while other mental content gets dimmed, opaque and subconscious. These examples show that we cannot talk of any permanent parallels between the intensity of internal impulses and the clarity of sensations which are their mental counterpart. This is why the relative clarity of self-consciousness depends on the intensity of physiological functions only to the extent that relatively clear sensations correspond to internal impulses. If consciousness is focused during intense movement or physical work, as is usually the case at moments of close attention, consciousness of the self, i.e. life, may become very blurred even though some internal and organic impulses are stronger than they are at times of relative rest.

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