Subjectivism and the Mental

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ABSTRACT: This paper defends the view that one's own mental states are metaphysically privileged vis-à-vis the mental states of others, even if only subjectively so. This is an instance of a more general view called *Subjectivism*, according to which reality is only subjectively the way it is. After characterizing Subjectivism in analogy to two relatively familiar views in the metaphysics of modality and time, I compare the *Subjectivist View of the Mental* with *Egocentric Presentism*, a version of Subjectivism recently advocated by Caspar Hare. I then argue that the Subjectivist View of the Mental goes a considerable way towards solving (or dissolving) certain long-standing philosophical puzzles having to do with the unity of consciousness, the contents of self-awareness and the intransmissibility of experiential knowledge through testimony.

There does not seem to be much point in the notion of a subjective fact – something that is a *fact* without being *objectively* the case. Among the things we call "facts" it is hard to find anything worth describing as "subjective". For example, take the fact that I am sitting right now. While this fact concerns me as opposed to anyone else, no one would describe it as a "subjective" fact: that I am sitting is true from my point of view just as much as it is true from your or anyone else's point of view – in a word, it is objectively true. Conversely, among the things we describe as "subjective" it is hard to find anything worth calling a "fact". For example, some have suggested that whether chocolate is tasty should be regarded as a subjective matter: that chocolate is tasty is true by the standards of some people and false by those of others. But even those who find chocolate tasty would feel nervous saying that it's a "fact" that chocolate is tasty. After all, there seems to be no absolute fact of the matter as to whether chocolate is tasty; and if there is no *absolute* fact of the matter as to whether chocolate is tasty, how could there be such a thing as the *fact* that chocolate is tasty?

In effect, it may be suggested that the notion of a subjective fact is not just pointless, but also incoherent. For when we describe something as "subjective" we mean that it reflects a particular point of view on reality. But when we describe something as a "fact", we mean that it reflects the way reality is in and of itself. So how could something be a fact and, at the same time, be subjective? The very idea of a subjective fact seems to be a contradiction in terms.[1]

Given these premises, it is no wonder that *Subjectivism* – the view that reality is only

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[1]   This is what, among others, Moore (1997, 45-50) argues.

subjectively the way it is – has received little attention and even less support from contemporary metaphysicians: if there are no subjective facts, every question concerning how reality is in and of itself must have an objective answer. And this means that, whichever way reality is, it must be objectively that way.

In rejecting both the premises and the conclusions of the foregoing line of reasoning, this paper aims to be something of a subjectivist manifesto. I will begin by arguing that – given certain well-known analogies between subjectivity, modality and time – there is no good reason to regard the notion of a subjective fact as contradictory or incoherent (§1). I will then present my grounds for thinking that there are, indeed, subjective facts (§ 2). On the version of Subjectivism I will explore, subjective facts do not concern just me: they concern every individual endowed with a mental life. And they do not concern evaluative properties like the property of being tasty: they concern the distribution, among the individuals there are, of certain mental properties. I will therefore call my preferred version of Subjectivism the "Subjectivist View of the Mental". The Subjectivist View of the Mental differs from Egocentric Presentism, a version of Subjectivism recently defended by Caspar Hare (2009). In § 3, I will contrast these two views, highlighting the advantages of the one I favour. Finally, in § 4, I will put the Subjectivist View to work, showing that it goes a considerable way towards solving certain philosophical puzzles that the customary conception of the mental (or the "Mainstream View", as I shall call it) gives rise to.

1. Subjectivism

I call something a "subjective fact" when it is a fact, but it is not objectively the case. The purpose of this section is to clarify what it takes for something that is *not* objectively the case to qualify as a *fact*, so as to dispel any worries that the notion of a *subjective fact* might be inherently incoherent.

It has long been observed that, abstracting away from the differences between these different areas of metaphysics, certain structural parallels hold between subjectivity, on the one hand, and modality and time, on the other. In particular, the modal analogue of a subjective fact is a *contingent fact*, something that is a fact without being necessarily the case. And the temporal analogue of a subjective fact is a *temporary fact*, something that is a fact without being permanently the case. These analogies are both encouraging and useful. They are encouraging because if there's nothing incoherent in the notion of a contingent or a temporary fact (and there does not seem to be), chances are that the notion of a subjective fact is also one that we can make decent sense of. And

they are useful because they allow us to formulate Subjectivism (the view that reality is only subjectively the way it is) in analogy to *Contingencism* (the view that reality is only contingently the way it is) and *Temporaneism* (the view that reality is only temporarily the way it is).[2]

So let us begin by taking a closer look at these two views, both of which are more popular and familiar than Subjectivism. While there are certainly various ways of formulating them, my preferred one involves talk of *propositions*. I use the term "propositions" to refer to whatever things are the objects of belief and other propositional attitudes and the semantic values of declarative sentences relative to contexts.[3] While I assume that there are entities of this kind, and that at least some of them can instantiate the monadic properties of truth simpliciter and falsity simpliciter, I make no assumption concerning their metaphysical nature (in particular, whether they are structured or unstructured, coarse- or fine-grained, sparse or abundant, etc.).

Contingencism is the thesis that reality is only contingently the way it is. But if reality is only contingently the way it is, some propositions that happen to describe reality correctly do not do so necessarily. And this means that, while these propositions are true simpliciter, they do not hold true under all possible circumstances or, as it is usually put, *in all possible worlds*.[4] Conversely, if some propositions that are true simpliciter do *not* hold true in all possible worlds, reality cannot be *necessarily* the way it is. So the essence of Contingencism can be captured by the claim that:

(*Contingencism*) Some propositions are true simpliciter without being true in all possible worlds.

From here to the notion of a contingent fact it's a small step. When a proposition is true simpliciter it can be said to represent a fact (for something is a fact if it reflects the way reality is in and of itself and what is it for a proposition to reflect the way reality is *in and of itself* if not for it to be true *simpliciter*?). But when it is not true under all possible circumstances, a proposition cannot be regarded as necessary. Hence the formulation of Contingencism I just offered carries with it a commitment to facts that are contingent rather than necessary, as was to be expected.[5]

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[2]   I chose these neologisms because the terms "Temporaryism" and "Contingentism" have recently been used by Williamson (2013) to refer to certain controversial theses about ontology, while the term "temporalism" belongs to a long-standing debate in semantics (Richard 1980). "Temporaneism" is my label for the view that McTaggart (1908) called (somewhat unhelpfully) the "A-theory" of time. The analogy between subjectivity, modality and time is a central theme in the philosophy of Arthur Prior (see, in particular, Prior and Fine (1977)).

[3]   This is the way the term "propositions" has traditionally been used. There are, of course, dissonant voices – most notably, Lewis (1980) argued that the things that are objects of our attitudes are not also the semantic values of sentences relative to context. For a recent response see Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009).

[4]   For present purposes, I will ignore the distinction, drawn by Adams (1981) between truth *in* a possible world and truth *at* a possible world.

[5]   The negation of Contingencism is Necessitarianism – a view whose most famous defender is (arguably) Spinoza, who thought that "nothing in nature is contingent", because "things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than is the case" (Spinoza 2002, 234-235).

On to Temporaneism. Temporaneism is the view that reality is only temporarily the way it is. But if reality is only temporarily the way it is, some propositions that happen to describe reality correctly do not *always* describe it correctly. And this means that, while these propositions are true simpliciter they do not hold true *at all times*. Conversely, if some propositions that are true simpliciter do *not* hold true at all times, reality cannot be *eternally* the way it is. So the essence of Temporaneism is the thesis that:

(*Temporaneism*) Some propositions are true simpliciter without being true at all times.

Once again, if every proposition that is true simpliciter represents a fact, it's easy to see that this formulation of Temporaneism carries with it a commitment to the idea that some facts are temporary rather than sempiternal.[6]

Finally, Subjectivism. Just as contingencists think that how reality is is a contingent matter and temporaneists think that how reality is is a temporary matter, subjectivists think that how reality is is a subjective matter – they think that reality is only subjectively the way it is. But what does it mean to say that reality is only *subjectively* the way it is? At a first pass, it means that some propositions that happen to describe reality correctly do not *objectively* do so – subjectivity being to objectivity what contingency is to necessity and temporariness to sempiternity. But, given what we have said so far, the analysis can be pushed a little further. Necessary truth is standardly defined as truth *in all possible worlds* and sempiternal truth is standardly defined as truth *at all times*. Why not adopt a similar strategy here and think of objective truth as truth that holds across a series of 'points' analogous to (but, obviously, different in kind from) possible worlds and times? I suggest we call the points in question "points of view" and formulate Subjectivism as follows:

(*Subjectivism*) Some propositions are true simpliciter without being true from all points of view.

It is important to see that this claim wouldn't be of much interest if by "point of view" we meant what is ordinarily meant by this expression, i.e. someone's opinion about something or, quite literally, someone's perceptual perspective. For then Subjectivism would reduce to the platitude that some propositions, though true simpliciter, are contradicted by someone's opinions about something or by the way things look from someone's perceptual perspective. However, the analogy with

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[6] The negation of Temporaneism is Sempiternalism, the view that reality is eternally the way it is or, equivalently, that all facts are eternal because every proposition true simpliciter is also true at all times. A champion of Sempiternalism is J. J. C. Smart, according to whom "the transitory aspect of time […] is an illusion that prevents us seeing the world as it really is" (1998, 94).

possible worlds and times suggests a different way of using the expression "point of view". When we think of a possible world, we think of a way in which reality could manifest itself – a *possible manifestation* of reality, as one might put it. We do *not* think (or, at least, we are reluctant to think) of possible worlds as ways in which reality can be *imagined* to be. For couldn't reality manifest itself in ways that no one is actually able to imagine? Analogously, when we think of a time – a past time, let's suppose – we do *not* think of it as a way in which reality can be *remembered* to be. For isn't there more to the past than anyone can possibly remember? A past time is just a way in which reality manifested itself in the past – a certain kind of *temporary manifestation* of reality. Similar considerations apply to points of view. Just as we need not reduce possible worlds to sets of imaginings and past times to sets of memories or recollections, we need not reduce points of view to sets of perceptions or opinions. Instead, we can think of a point of view as a way in which reality manifests itself to some subject – a *subjective manifestation* of reality. In doing so, we allow that something may be the case from a certain subject's point of view without that subject (or anyone else, for that matter) taking notice of it, either perceptually or doxastically. It is this metaphysical notion of a point of view – which is, arguably, as basic and primitive as the notion of a possible world or a time – that subjectivists need in order to state their position: a subjectivist thinks that *reality in and of itself* varies across different subjects, not just that reality is *believed* or *perceived* to be different by different subjects. And this is just another way of saying that, for a subjectivist, at least some of the facts that constitute reality are subjective rather than objective.

(Notice that, just as contingencists need not deny the existence of necessary facts and temporaneists need not need deny the existence of eternal facts, subjectivists need not deny the existence of objective facts – their point is, more simply, that objective facts are not the only facts there are. Notice also that, while I proposed to call "objective" any fact that obtains from every point of view, Subjectivism is compatible with more robust notions of objectivity. We might say that it is a *strongly objective fact* that p when it is a fact that p and, necessarily, p if and only if it is an objective fact that p. And we might say that it is an *absolutely objective fact* that p when it is a strongly objective fact that p and no subjective fact features among the grounds of the fact that p.[7] Nothing in Subjectivism rules out the existence of strongly objective and absolutely objective facts).

It is important to see that, as I chose to formulate them, Contingencism, Temporaneism and Subjectivism make essential use of the property of truth simpliciter. This differentiates them from three other theses about propositions, namely:

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[7]   The distinction between (merely) objective truths and absolutely objective truth parallels Fine's interesting
       distinction between (merely) necessary truths and transcendent truths (Fine 2005, 324).

(*World-relativism*) Some propositions are true in some possible worlds without being true in all possible worlds.

(*Time-relativism*) Some propositions are true at some times without being true at all times.

(*Subject-relativism*) Some propositions are true from some points of view without being true from all points of view.

World-relativism, Time-relativism and Subject-relativism say nothing about what sort of things can be true simpliciter. So a good case can be made that they have no implication (or, at least, no direct implication) for whether the way reality is in and of itself is contingent, temporary or subjective. For example, a time-relativists who thinks that among the possible objects of belief and other propositional attitudes there is the time-relative proposition *that it is raining in Paris* need not believe that that proposition can be true (or false) simpliciter – she need not believe that there is any non-time-relative fact of the matter as to whether it is raining in Paris.[8] Similarly, a subject-relativist who thinks that among the possible objects of belief and other propositional attitudes there is the subject-relative proposition *that chocolate is tasty* need not believe that that proposition can be true (or false) simpliciter – she need not believe that there is any non-subject-relative fact of the matter as to whether chocolate is tasty.[9] What's distinctive of contingencists, temporaneists and subjectivists is that, besides accepting the existence of world-, time- and subject-relative propositions, they also deem (some of) these propositions capable, all by themselves, of describing reality correctly or incorrectly and, therefore, of instantiating the monadic properties of truth simpliciter and falsity simpliciter.

Some will see a tension here. It might be urged that one cannot describe a proposition as true *simpliciter* and then go on to say of that proposition that it is true '*in*' some worlds and not others, '*at*' some times and not at others or '*from*' some points of view and not others – truth simpliciter might be thought to be incompatible with various species of relative truth. But such a reaction would be mistaken. Just as one can say that the proposition *that God does not exist* is true

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[8]   Mellor (1998) and Sider (2001) are both examples of this: they accept Time-relativism without accepting Temporaneism.

[9]   See, for instance, Kolbel (2003) and Lasersohn (2005). The difference between Subjectivism and Subject-relativism is obscured by the fact that Subject-relativism licenses assertions of the form "It is a fact that chocolate is tasty" or "It is true absolutely or simpliciter that chocolate is tasty". But the whole point is that, on any standard subject-relativist account, the very truth of these assertions is relativized to this or that point of view. The dialectic here is familiar: "The relativist [...] does indeed allow a syntactically monadic truth predicate that behaves in a disquotational way (roughly, 'S' is true relative to a parameter value iff "S' is true' is true relative to that value). But [he] does not think of 'true' as expressing a monadic property" (Cappelen and Hawthorne 2011, 460).

simpliciter and then go on to say that the very same proposition is not true *according to* the Bible, one can say that some propositions are true simpliciter and then go on to say that the same propositions are not true *in* some worlds, *at* some times and *from* some points of view. There are two kinds of properties at stake here: a monadic property (*being true*) and a bunch of relations (*being true in*, *being true at*, *being true from*). Contingencists, temporaneists and subjectivists need not choose between one kind and the other. At most, they owe us an explanation of how they are related. But this they can easily do.

Contingencists take what is true absolutely or simpliciter to be what is true in a particular world, the actual world:

A proposition is true simpliciter iff it is true in the actual world.

Of what is true in some possible world or another, contingencists say that it is *possibly* true:

A proposition is *possibly* true iff it is true in some possible world.

Temporaneist do something similar. They take what is true absolutely or simpliciter to be what is true at one particular time, the present time:

A proposition is true simpliciter iff it is true at the present time.

Of what is true at times that precede or follow the present time, temporaneists say that it is *was* or *will be* true:

A proposition *was* true iff it is true at a time earlier than the present time.
A proposition *will be* true iff it is true at a time later than the present time.

Subjectivists will adopt a similar strategy. They will identify a certain point of view – call it the "firstpersonal" point of view – such that all and only what is true from that point of view is also true simpliciter:

A proposition is true simpliciter iff it is true from the firstpersonal point of view.

They can then talk of what is true from any point of view other than the firstpersonal one as being

only *otherpersonally* true:

A proposition is *otherpersonally* true iff it is true from a point of view other than the firstpersonal one.

So, for example, a subjectivist who thinks that the proposition *that chocolate is tasty* is true simpliciter (i.e. that, contrary to what is generally assumed, there is an absolute fact of the matter as to the tastiness of chocolate) may concede that that proposition is not otherpersonally true, meaning that it is not true from points of view other than the firstpersonal one. Notice that, on the resulting picture, the proposition *that chocolate is tasty* does double duty: it reflects how reality is in and of itself, while also reflecting one point of view among others. Subjectivists achieve this combination (and thereby vindicate the coherence of the notion of a subjective fact) because they identify the way reality is in and of itself with the way reality is according to one point of view among others – the point of view which they call "firstpersonal".

It is straightforward to see that, given the foregoing theses about the relationship between monadic and relative truth (and assuming that when a proposition is not true from a given standpoint, it is false from that standpoint), Contingencism, Temporaneism and Subjectivism can also be stated in the following ways:

(*Contingencism**) Some propositions that are true simpliciter are possibly false.
(*Temporaneism**) Some propositions that are true simpliciter were or will be false.
(*Subjectivism**) Some propositions that are true simpliciter are otherpersonally false.

Some will prefer these formulations to the ones I gave earlier on the ground that they are formulated in terms of the notion of monadic truth, which they take to be conceptually more basic. I myself do not want to take a stand on this issue. Others will prefer these formulations to the ones I gave earlier on the ground that they do not overtly quantify over such things as possible worlds, times and points of view. But even if they do not overtly quantify over these things, it is unclear that they avoid ontological commitment to them – at any rate, I am not going to assume that they do. In what follows, I will switch back and forth freely between talk of something being otherpersonally true and talk of something being true from some other point of view (i.e. from some point of view other than the firstpersonal one) – nothing of what I will say hinges crucially on whether or not points of view can be 'paraphrased away' in terms of the notion of what is otherpersonally the case. I will also switch back and forth freely between talk of the proposition that p being true simpliciter

but otherpersonally false and talk of the fact that p being a subjective fact – for my purposes, there is no need to choose between an ontology of propositions and an ontology of facts.

2. The Subjectivist View of the Mental

Subjectivism is the view that some propositions are true simpliciter without being true from all points of view. In the last section, I defended the intelligibility of this view. But why do I believe this view to be true? In a nutshell, because I happen have to certain intuitions about the world and my place within it and I think that these intuitions cannot be vindicated if Subjectivism is false.

This answer will not satisfy everyone. In particular, it will not satisfy those who deny that intuitions can, all by themselves, provide one with good *reasons* for believing this or that philosophical view. I disagree with this claim, but a defence of the epistemic role of intuitions in philosophical theorizing would take me too far afield. Holders of the view that intuitions are epistemically idle can take what I am going to say in this section as an account (or, if they want, a confession) of how I came to believe Subjectivism in the first place. Later on, when discussing the virtues of the Subjectivist View of the Mental vis-à-vis the Mainstream View, I will try to show that the attraction of Subjectivism goes well beyond its intuitive appeal. I present intuitions first simply because they are what first made me see Subjectivism in a favourable light.

What are these intuitions I have? Really, they boil down to a very simple thought: that, of all individuals in the world, the individual I am, Giovanni, is somehow *special*. Put it this way: if I were to write a book entitled "The World As I Found It" or "The World As It Really Is", Giovanni would have a role in that book that no other individual has. He would be (I blush to say) the *main character* of that book, the only and authentic *center* of the world. That, of all individuals there are, Giovanni is the one having this role strikes me as an undeniable and all-too-important fact. To me, writing the book of the world without mentioning the fact that Giovanni is special would be writing an incomplete book.[10]

The intuition will sound very vague, but it can be made more precise. In what sense is Giovanni special? What does this specialness consist in? To be sure, I don't want to deny that Giovanni resembles other subjects in many respects. For example, just like other subjects, Giovanni has mental states of various sorts: fears, desires, beliefs, hopes, thoughts, experiences and feelings. But then, again, take Giovanni's fears. It seems to me to be a fact as clear as daylight that what Giovanni fears is more quintessentially *fearsome* than what other people fear. Or take Giovanni's

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[10] I borrowed the suggestive title "The World As I Found It" from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (§ 5.631).

desires. It seems to me to be a fact as clear as daylight that nothing is as quintessentially *desirable* as what Giovanni desires. Of all fears and all desires, Giovanni's fears and desires are (if I may use a typographical trick to convey this intuitive point) FEARS and DESIRES: they are fears and desires *par excellence* because they make their objects truly and quintessentially fearsome and truly and quintessentially desirable.[11]

What goes for fears and desires goes also for other intentional states. Giovanni's beliefs, hopes, thoughts, convictions and conjectures make certain aspects or portions of the world (the aspects and portions of the world that they are about) *interesting, salient* and *important* in a way that no other subject's beliefs, hopes, thoughts, convictions and conjectures do – Giovanni's beliefs, hopes, thoughts, convictions and conjectures are BELIEFS, HOPES, THOUGHTS, CONVICTIONS and CONJECTURES.

And what goes for intentional states goes also for non-intentional states (or states that have been alleged to be non-intentional). I would say that there's nothing as *painful* as Giovanni's pains, nor anything as *pleasant* as Giovanni's pleasures. More in general, Giovanni's experiences are quintessentially *experiential* and Giovanni's feelings *make themselves felt* in a way in which the feelings of no other subjects do. Giovanni's pains, pleasures, experiences and feelings are PAINS, PLEASURES, EXPERIENCES and FEELINGS.

To generalize, Giovanni's mental states, and only Giovanni's mental states have some unmistakeable 'glow' to them that makes them MENTAL states. And the difference between MENTAL states and the mental states of others couldn't be starker. To borrow the words of William James:

> […] the former have a warmth and intimacy about them of which the latter are completely devoid, being merely conceived, in a cold and foreign fashion, and not appearing as blood-relatives, bringing their greetings to us from out of the past. (James 1950, 332).

Sceptics try to convince me all the time that all this is nonsense. "There's nothing special about Giovanni" – they say – "except that *you* are Giovanni. And there's nothing special about Giovanni's mental states except that they are *your* mental states. If that is all you are aiming at, there is not much metaphysical substance to the intuitions you are appealing to".

This dismissal is too hasty. Suppose the (alleged) specialness of Giovanni's mental states reduced to the fact that they are *my* mental states. Then presumably the same asymmetry I (seem to) observe between my mental states and everyone else's mental states I would also (seem to) observe

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[11] There is a difference between saying that x is more F than y and saying that x is more *quintessentially* F than y. I do not dispute the fact that others's fears and desires can (sometimes) be more intense than mine. Still it is *my* fears and *my* desires that possess the essence of fearing and desiring in the purest and most concentrated form. Thanks to Tim Crane for pressing me on this point.

between *my* shoes and everyone else's shoes or between *my* nose and everyone else's nose. And so I would be tempted to distinguish between shoes and SHOES and between noses and NOSES just as much as I am tempted to distinguish between mental states and MENTAL states. But of course I am not tempted to do that: my intuitions tell me that my mental states are special, while my shoes and nose are not. So, whatever it consists it, the specialness of my mental states cannot be reduced to the fact that they are my mental states.

"Fair enough. Giovanni's mental states are special in a way that Giovanni's shoes or Giovanni's nose are not. But they are special *for Giovanni*, in the same way as Mary's mental states are special *for Mary* and Fred's mental states are special *for Fred*. We all bear a special relationship to our own mental states – a relationship that we do not bear to our nose or our shoes. So what? Haven't we known this all along?"

This reply misunderstands the import of my intuitions. It may be true that all mental states have the property of being special for their owner and nobody else. In this respect, they may well be all on a par. But the point of my intuitions is precisely that, no matter what properties are shared across all mental states, there must *also* be some property that distinguishes my mental states from the mental states of others. As Wittgenstein's interlocutor says in this passage from the *Philosophical Investigations*:

> 398. "When I imagine something, or even actually *see* objects, I have *got* something which my neighbour has not." – I understand you. You want to look about you and say: "At any rate only I have got THIS." (Wittgenstein 1986, 120)

I want to look about and say that that there is a property that only *my* mental states have. If all mental states have the property of being special *for* their owner, then perhaps my mental states have the property of being special, *full stop*. That's what I am referring to when I say that, unlike all other mental states, my mental states are MENTAL states.

"Maybe it *seems* to you as if your mental states were different from the mental states of others. But that's just because you know them *directly*, via introspection, and you know the mental states of others *indirectly*, based on the observation of their behaviour. Your mental life is *not* different from all other mental lives, it's just that you constantly look at it through the deforming lens of introspection".

I think I could easily accept this error-theory if I could easily accept the idea of introspection. But, deep down, my intuitions recalcitrate. It is not so much that I agree with Ryle that "'introspection' is a term of art and one for which little use is found in the self-descriptions of

untheoretical people" (Ryle 1949, 152). And it is not so much that I trust the authority of those psychologists who say that self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds are *not* associated with radically different ways of knowing.[12] It is just that if I pay close attention to what I do when I try to find out how things are with my mental life, I find no unitary method or process – no specific act of 'looking within' that deserves the name of "introspection".[13] Phenomenologically speaking, the deforming lens of introspection is nowhere to be found. And if there is no deforming lens, there can't be any deformation: that my mental states are MENTAL states is not a *illusion*. It is simply a *fact*, as hard a fact as any other.

"You may reject the notion of introspection. But you certainly won't deny that you know your own mental states *better* than you know other people's mental states. That's the source of your mistake: you take your mental states to be *metaphysically* privileged just because you happen to have some kind of privileged *access* to them".

I am not sure I have privileged epistemic access to my mental states (there are good philosophical arguments to the contrary and I think I could easily let myself be convinced by these arguments if I were allowed to conceive of my mental states as *metaphysically* privileged vis-à-vis the mental states of others). At any rate, the existence of privileged access is quite irrelevant to my intuitions. I think I could have the most extensive and immediate knowledge of other people's mental states – that wouldn't make them MENTAL states. And I could have the most poor and superficial knowledge of my mental states – they would be MENTAL states nonetheless.[14]

"So you really believe this claim – that Giovanni is special and that his mental states are MENTAL states – to express an objective fact of the matter about how reality is in and of itself?"

Two separate questions are packed together here. Do I believe the claim that Giovanni is special to reflect the way reality is in and of itself? Yes, I do, otherwise I wouldn't call it a "fact". But do I believe it to be an *objective* fact, the kind of fact that obtains *from all points of view*? Of course not. My intuitions tell me that Giovanni is special, but they also tell me that, *from some other point of view*, Giovanni is not special and other individuals are special instead. Take you, for

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12 See Carruthers (2011).
13 See Schwitzgebel (2012) for a defence of this point with which I am very much in agreement. One could reply that even if there is no *unitary* method or process through which one typically gains knowledge of one's own mental states, there could nevertheless be some method or process that is *unique* to self-knowledge (i.e that only ever allows one to know about *one's own* mental states) and that is dedicated to a *subset* of one's own mental states (Evans's (1982, 225) 'transparency' method for determining one's own beliefs would be a case in point). However, note that, far from giving us an account of what makes *all* of one's mental states special vis-à-vis those of other subjects, this reply motivates a distinction *within* the sphere of one's own mental states, between those that can be known through the method in questions and those that cannot. Whether or not this 'internal' distinction exists, it is not one that the intuitions I am concerned with here seem to support.
14 McGinn (2004) argues that it is, at most, a contingent fact that we have privileged access to our own mental lives: there are possible worlds in which one has privileged access to other minds and non-privileged access to one's own mind. It seems intuitive to think that, even in such possible worlds, an asymmetry would remain between oneself and others: only one's own mental states would be also MENTAL states.

example. If, after reading what I've written so far, you decided to trust the same kind of intuitions I decided to trust, you would come to believe that *you* are special and that *your* mental states are MENTAL states. It is impossible for me not to acknowledge that *from some other point of view* reality is, indeed, as those beliefs represent it to be.[15] And acknowledging this is acknowledging that there's a point of view (what I shall call "your" point of view) from which you are special, and not Giovanni. More generally, I must acknowledge that for every individual that can be credited with an inner mental life, there is one and only one point of view (what I shall call the point of view "of" that individual) from which that individual, and only that individual is special, in that his or her mental states are MENTAL states.[16] It is true (i.e. true simpliciter) that Giovanni is special – I have no doubt about that – but *otherpersonally* he is not special.

To the extent that I trust my intuitions, then, the picture of reality I am drawn to looks more or less like this:

> Reality contains many things: mountains and rivers, plants and animals, stars and planets. Truths concerning these things are all objective: they hold from every point of view.[17] Among the many things reality contains, there are individuals who enjoy mental states: beliefs, hopes, desires, feelings and the like. Truths concerning which individuals there are and which mental states they enjoy are also objective truths. But then, alongside these objective truths, there are some subjective truths, too. Chief among them, the truth (simpliciter) that Giovanni, is special in that Giovanni's beliefs, hopes, desires, and feelings are BELIEFS, HOPES, DESIRES and FEELINGS. These truths are subjective in that *otherpersonally* (i.e. from some other points of view) Giovanni is not special and other individuals are special instead.

The view embodied in this picture is what I call the "Subjectivist View of the Mental" (SVM, hereafter). If I were to write a book entitled "The World As I Found It" or "The World As It Really Is", that book would be a detailed and fully worked-out version of SVM. And it's because I've been intrigued by SVM that I came to embrace Subjectivism, the general doctrine that reality is only subjectively the way it is.

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[15]   In the next section, I will explain how this observation can be used to vindicate the correctness of your belief that you are special and that your mental states are MENTAL states.

[16]   Prior (1968) has a discussion of how the statement that something is the case *from one and only one* point of view can be expressed by someone who wants to do away with quantification over points of view or other kinds of subjective standpoints.

[17]   One might add "*absolutely* objective", in the sense defined in § 1.

Perhaps, the most striking feature of SVM is its uncompromising inegalitarian character.[18] SVM does not deny the existence of points of view other than my own – on the contrary, it presupposes and requires their existence (or, what amounts to the same thing, it presupposes and requires a distinction between what is the case and what is otherpersonally the case). Nevertheless, SVM *privileges* my point of view over all others: it says that, of all points of view, it is *my* point of view – the point of view from which Giovanni is special, and no one else – that is also the *firstpersonal* point of view – the point of view which reflects how reality is, in and of itself. Some might think that this should be reason enough for me to disbelieve SVM. After all, "it seems quite bizarre to suppose that, from among all the individuals that there are, the subjective world-order [should be] somehow oriented towards me as opposed to anyone else" (Fine 2005, 313). Never mind that the view is coherent and finds prima facie support in my intuitions. Doesn't it deserve the same 'incredulous stare' with which I look at other far-fetched and outlandish philosophical theses?

I think not. First of all, it is not immediately obvious to me why the inegalitarian character of SVM should be regarded as *bizarre*. Consider the claim that the modal world-order is oriented towards *this* world (as opposed to any other possible world) and that the temporal world-order is oriented towards *this* time (as opposed to any other time). In one's philosophical moments – and with a bit of effort – one can bring oneself to perceive the "bizarre" arbitrariness of these claims (why should *this* world be actual rather than one containing talking donkeys? Why should *2016* be present rather than, say, 1492?). Yet, for all their "arbitrariness", these claims express respectable, credible and perhaps even commonsensical views, with a long and venerable philosophical tradition. If, in comparison with them, there is nothing *distinctively* bizarre about the idea that the totality of facts is oriented towards my point of view, it is unclear why it be *rational* for me to dismiss this idea and distrust the intuitions that appear to support it.

And then, again, the kind of inegalitarianism implied by SVM is no so far-fetched and outlandish as a superficial understanding of the view might suggest. If SVM is true, reality is, indeed, oriented towards a single point of view. But remember that, given Subjectivism, reality is not *objectively* the way it is, so *which* point of view get to be privileged is, itself, a subjective matter. The claim is *not* that my point of view is firstpersonal from every point of view, but only that it *is* firstpersonal – that the way things have always appeared to me to be (*this* individual being special, *his* mental states being MENTAL states) is also the way things *are*. SVM, then, *is* inegalitarian, but in a subtler – and, I think less incredible – way than would justify me to dismiss it out of hand.[19]

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18   I borrow this use of the terms "egalitarian" and "inegalitarian" from Hellie (2013).
19   I add, in passing, that there might be ways to reconcile the thesis that the totality of facts is oriented towards one point of view with the idea that, most fundamentally, all points of view are metaphysically on a par. One option

3. Other versions of Subjectivism

I said that Subjectivism is a relatively unpopular position – at least much less popular than Contingencism and Temporaneism. This is not to say that Subjectivism has never been advocated by anyone. As far as I can tell, the first philosophers whose position has clear subjectivist undertones is G.W. Leibniz. Leibniz believed in the existence of a multitude (in fact, an infinity) of entities called "monads" that he described as "metaphysical points" (Leibniz 1989, 142). At the heart of his metaphysics, there is the idea that the actual world (i.e. "the universe") genuinely varies across these different points:

> Just as the same city viewed from different directions appears entirely different and, as it were, multiplied perspectively, in just the same way it happens that, because of the infinite multitude of simple substances, there are, as it were, just as many different universes, which are, nevertheless, only perspectives on a single one, corresponding to the different points of view of each monad. (Leibniz 1989, 220)

Leibniz started from the assumption that every substance or monad is a "living mirror that represents the universe according to its own point of view" (Leibniz 1989, 211). In principle, this assumption would be compatible with the view that the universe, though represented differently by different monads, is objectively the way it is. But Leibniz did not content himself with this view and claimed, instead, that each substance *is* a universe or a concentrated world. It does not seem too much of a stretch to regard this position as a form of Subjectivism: the universe cannot be reduced to what is objectively the case and since what is subjectively the case varies from the point of view of one substance to that of another what must be said is that "the universe is in some way multiplied as many times as there are substances" (Leibniz 1989, 42).

Among contemporary philosophers, Subjectivism does not have many followers. Arthur Prior saw that there was at least logical room for a coherent philosophical position that treated subjectivity in the way Temporaneism treats time. But, while he thought that this position could provide us with a key to understanding Leibniz's view of the world, he also equated it to "some sort of idealism or relativism" and found it "hard to believe" (Prior 1968, 200). More recently, Kit Fine has discussed a metaphysical view called "First-personal Realism", according to which "reality is

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would be to adopt a conception on which the totality of what is most fundamentally the case extends *beyond* the totality of facts (for a defence of this non-factive conception of the metaphysically fundamental, see Merlo (2013)). Alternatively, one could take all points of view to be on a par vis-à-vis truth simpliciter by treating them as different 'fragments' of an overall incoherent totality of facts (for a discussion of this 'fragmentalist' account, see Fine (2005) and Lipman (2016)). My own preference goes to the first strategy – the second runs the risk of undermining the sense in which I am, indeed, special vis-à-vis all other subjects.

not exhausted by the 'objective' or impersonal facts but also includes facts that reflect a first-person point of view" (2005, 311). But (even setting aside some important differences between Subjectivism and First-personal Realism, due to Fine's particular gloss on the notion of "reality") Fine is adamant that he is not concerned to defend any particular version of First-personal Realism; he is just interested in seeing how First-personal Realism – in its most general form – might be best developed. Meanwhile, other philosophers have emphasised the limits of an objectivistist treatment of mental phenomena without going so far as to embrace a subjectivist metaphysics.[20]

Caspar Hare's book *On Myself and Other Less Important Subjects* (2009) is an interesting exception to this objectivist consensus. Hare advocates a form of Subjectivism that he calls "Egocentric Presentism" (EP, hereafter). If I were an Egocentric Presentist instead of a defender of SVM, I would endorse a picture along these lines:

> Reality contains many things: mountains and rivers, plants and animals, stars and planets, subject and mental states. Truths concerning these things are almost all objective. What is subjective is the fact that all and only the perceptual objects of Giovanni's mental states (e.g. the table he is looking at, the itch he feels in his neck, etc.) instantiate *presence*. This fact is subjective in that, for any subject S other than Giovanni, *from S's point of view* Giovanni's mental states do not instantiate presence and the perceptual objects of S's mental states instantiate presence instead.

How does EP differ from SVM and why do I prefer the latter to the former? Subtleties aside, the central difference regards the nature of subjective facts: Hare and I agree that reality contains subjective facts, but we disagree on what kind of facts they are. According to Hare, subjective facts concern the distribution of a certain property he calls 'presence' (hence the label of 'Egocentric *Presentism*'). According to me, subjective facts concern the distribution of certain mental properties (hence the label of 'Subjectivist View *of the Mental*').

One reason why I prefer SVM to EP has to do with what Hare says about presence. He says that presence is instantiated by perceptual objects (Hare 2009, 21-22) and that perceptual objects include both mental particulars (pains, itches, etc.) and garden-variety macroscopic objects

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[20] Here I have in mind the work of Thomas Nagel and Benj Hellie. In *The View from Nowhere*, Nagel argues that "no objective conception of the mental world can include it all" (1986, 25), but also that "the world cannot contain irreducibly first-person facts" (1986, 57). Hellie (2013; 2014) defends a non-objectivist account of counsciousness, but thinks that, to the extent that we treat consciousness as a subjective phenomenon, we should not "think of distinctions in consciousness as distinctions in the world" (2014, 261). His view, then, seems to me to presuppose an anti-realist stance towards the subjective that makes it interestingly different from the subjectivist account I am proposing in this paper.

(telephones, cars, paintings etc.). Though not completely counterintuitive, this setup raises questions that I would have a hard time answering if I were an Egocentric Presentist. For example, if the painting I am looking at instantiates presence, do all of the painting's parts instantiate presence (including, e.g., the back surface of the painting or the single atoms that the painting is composed of)?[21] And if I am observing a star explosion through a telescope, does that star explosion instantiate presence *now* despite having occurred billions of years ago? Or did it rather instantiate presence *then* despite becoming only now an object of my visual perception? If one adopts SVM, these difficulties do not arise. I am not sure whether every part of a perceptual object is, itself, a perceptual object, but I have no doubt that something can have mental states without all of its parts having mental states (the tip of my nose does not have any mental states). Clearly, the same should be true of MENTAL states. I am not sure what to say about events that occur at one time and are perceived at a different time, but I am pretty sure that no pain can occur at one time and be experienced by its subject at a different time (for a pain to occur *just is* for its subject to experience it). Clearly, the point carries over to PAIN and other MENTAL states.

Another reason I have for preferring SVM to EP has to do with what Hare does *not* say about presence. For one thing, he offers no explicit analysis of the notion of "presence" in terms of other, more familiar notions.[22] For another, he doesn't posit any metaphysical or causal connection between presence and other, more familiar properties. So besides being conceptually primitive, presence is also metaphysically insulated. The combination of both features seems to me to be undesirable. Subjectivists are bound to treat the notion of "point of view" (or, alternatively, some other cognate notion, like the notion of something being "otherpersonally" the case) as primitive. I take it that it would be nice if they did not have to do the same thing with the notions of the particular subjective properties they posit. Moreover, if subjective properties neither ground nor are grounded by other, more familiar properties, they run the risk of being idle metaphysical danglers, things that have "nothing to do, no purpose to serve [and that] might as well, and undoubtedly [will] in time, be abolished" (Alexander 1920, 8).

Defenders of SVM are not committed to treating MENTAL states in the way Hare treats presence. On the contrary, they can connect mental states and MENTAL states by saying that the metaphysical nature (or essence) of any ordinary mental state consists in its being *either* a MENTAL state *or* an otherpersonal MENTAL state. So, for instance, the nature of a belief is to be either a BELIEF or an otherpersonal BELIEF, the nature of a pain is to be either a PAIN or an otherpersonal PAIN, and so

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21   The question is McDaniel's: "If x is present, are each of x's parts present?" (McDaniel 2012, 406).

22   Hare does connect the notion of "presence" with the concept "I", suggesting that the latter is a nonrigid concept that refers, in every possible world, to whoever has present experiences (Hare 2009, 52 and 82). But, while I share McDaniel's criticisms of this semantic claim (McDaniel 2012, 408-10), I am also not sure to what extent one could use it to arrive at a better understanding of what presence is.

on.[23] Let 'OTHER p' abbreviate 'It is otherpersonally true that p' and let '$\leftrightarrow_R$' indicate the giving of a *real definition*, i.e. a definition specifying the metaphysical nature of what appears on its left hand side in terms of what appears on its right hand side. Then the point can be put, more formally, as follows:

$$\text{belief (x)} \leftrightarrow_R \text{BELIEF (x) v OTHER BELIEF (x)}$$
$$\text{pain (x)} \leftrightarrow_R \text{PAIN (x) v OTHER PAIN (x)}$$

...

Adopting this strategy has two immediate advantages. The first is that, far from treating MENTAL states as metaphysical danglers, SVM gives them center stage: MENTAL states can be seen as the subjective foundations or 'grounds' of ordinary mental states.[24] The second is that, instead of presenting the notion of a MENTAL state as primitive, a defender of SVM can use various instances of the schema above to elucidate and clarify that notion. For example, instead of presenting the concept of "PAIN" as a primitive and explicating it solely by means of metaphors and examples (which is more or less what I did in § 2), one can characterize PAIN as that state X such that to be in pain (in the ordinary sense) is to be either in X or to be otherpersonally in X.[25] So even those of my readers who do not understand my metaphors and do not share my intuitions can grasp the meaning of "PAIN" – all they need in order to do so is the ordinary notion of pain and the notion of something being otherpersonally the case.

There's also a third advantage in relating mental states and MENTAL states in the way just suggested. It has to do with a problem that Hare himself discusses (Hare 2009, 52-55) and that, insofar as I can see, every subjectivist theory faces. The problem is the following. As Hare presents it, EP affirms that it is only the perceptual objects *of Caspar Hare* that instantiate presence (the perceptual objects of any subject other than Caspar Hare do *not* instantiate presence, although it is true that they do so *from the points of view of the subject in question*). But if a subject S other than

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[23]   In principle, it is open to Hare to add to EP the claim that, for every kind of perceptual object O, the nature of an O is to be either a present O or an otherpersonally present O. But remember that, for Hare, perceptual objects include things as diverse as pains, itches, tables, stars, etc. I doubt one will want to say that the nature of a star is to be either a present star or an otherpersonally present star. Plausibly, facts about the nature of stars are absolutely objective, in the sense of "absolutely objective" defined in § 1.

[24]   I note in passing that by treating MENTAL states as the subjective grounds of ordinary mental states SVM can rescue them from the threat of causal irrelevance: a MENTAL state can figure among the causes of every fact caused by the mental state grounded by it (much in the same way in which determinate properties can figure among the causes of every fact caused by their determinables, on at least some accounts of the relationship between determinables and determinates).

[25]   Importantly, this kind of analysis does *not* reflect what a defender of SVM like me takes to be the metaphysical order of priority (the analysis results from reading the definitions above right-to-left, instead of left-to-right). But this doesn't make it a bad conceptual analysis. The metaphysical order (i.e. the order of being) and the conceptual order (i.e. the order of understanding) need not always coincide.

Hare reads Hare's book and engages directly with the kind of intuitions Hare presents in that book, S will probably end up believing that S's perceptual objects (and not Hare's) instantiate presence. Now, Hare is under pressure not to classify S's belief as wrong (after all, in forming her belief, S did nothing but trust the same kind of intuitions that Hare himself trusted). But how can he not classify S's belief as wrong if, according to the theory Hare embraces, it is not *true* that S's perceptual objects instantiate presence?

Hare discusses three possible solutions to this problem, none of which seems to me to be fully satisfactory, at least in the context of EP. The first consists in saying that, although S believes a false proposition (namely *that S's perceptual objects instantiate presence*), S's belief qualifies as correct because the relevant proposition is true from S's point of view. This is tantamount to severing the connection between the correctness of a belief and the truth (simpliciter) of its content – a move that Hare gives us no independent reasons to accept. The second solution consists in denying that S believes the (false) proposition *that S's perceptual objects instantiate presence* and saying, instead, that S believes the (true) proposition *that from S's point of view S's perceptual objects instantiate presence*. But this strikes me as an awkward thing to say. Suppose that, after reading Hare's book, S says "It is S's perceptual objects and not Hare's that instantiate presence". What entitles Hare or anyone else to the supposition that, in S's mouth, those words do not express a belief in the proposition *that S's perceptual objects instantiate presence*? Why shouldn't Hare take S's words at face value?[26] The third solution consists in denying that S has any belief about presence, based on the general assumption that S has no beliefs at all: it is only from S's point of view that S can believe various things (including that S's perceptual objects instantiate presence). This, rather than merely awkward, strikes me as a deeply revisionary claim – ultimately it would commit Hare to saying that all subjects other than himself are creatures with no beliefs, hopes or desires whatsoever.

Now, a version of Hare's problem arises also for a defender of SVM like me. As I presented it in § 2, SVM says that only *Giovanni's* mental states are MENTAL states. But if a subject S other than myself reads § 2, engages directly with the kind of intuitions I discuss there and decides to trust them, S will probably end up believing a slightly different version of SVM, saying that S's mental states (and not mine) are MENTAL states. Now, I am under pressure not to classify S's belief as wrong (after all, in forming her belief, S did nothing but trust the same kind of intuitions that I trusted). But how can I not classify S's belief as wrong given that, according to the theory *I*

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[26] Hare says that "that the nature of the proposition expressed by an utterance may depend on whether the utterer has present or absent experiences (Hare 2009, 54). But, even if we accept this context-sensitivity, it's hard to see how the mere fact that S's perceptual objects do not instantiate presence can *prevent* S from forming the belief that S's perceptual objects instantiate presence.

embrace, only *my* mental states are MENTAL states?

My answer to this question draws on the distinction between BELIEFS and beliefs. When it comes to BELIEFS, I am happy to say that correctness and truth simpliciter go hand in hand:

(*CORRECTNESS*) A BELIEF in a proposition p is correct iff p is true simpliciter.

In fact, I want to say that part of what makes BELIEF the most fundamental kind of belief (a kind whose notion deserves to be written in capital letters) is the fact that it is connected with truth simpliciter in such a straightforward manner: a BELIEF is correct whenever its content is true simpliciter. But when it comes to ordinary beliefs, the crucial point for a defender of SVM like me is that their nature is disjunctive: to be a belief is to be either a BELIEF or an otherpersonal BELIEF. No wonder, then, that according to SVM the correctness conditions for beliefs will also be disjunctive:

(*Correctness*) A belief is correct iff it is a correct BELIEF *or* it is otherpersonally a correct BELIEF.

So consider S's belief *that S's mental states are MENTAL states*. To be sure, according to my theory, that belief is not a correct BELIEF, but that's simply because S has no BELIEFS at all (remember: according to my theory, only Giovanni's beliefs are BELIEFS). However, otherpersonally S's belief is a correct BELIEF (it is otherpersonally true *that S's mental states are MENTAL states*). So (by *Correctness*) S's belief is a correct belief. That is to say: given the nature of the beliefs she can form, it's right for S to form the beliefs she forms. And it's right for me to encourage S to form those beliefs, despite their content being false simpliciter.[27]

Notice that the solution is similar to the first Hare discusses (which is also Hare's preferred solution). In particular, it can be shown that, given suitable assumptions about the relationship between subjects and points of view (most notably, the assumption that for every subject there is one and only one point of view from which that subject's mental states are MENTAL states), *Correctness* entails the principle that Hare's first solution appeals to, namely:

(*Relative Correctness*) For any subject S, if S believes a proposition p then S's belief is correct iff p is true from S's point of view.

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[27] If Temporaneism is true, something similar happens in the case of future and past beliefs. One belief that historians will form in 1000 years from now is the belief in the proposition we would now express by saying "1000 years ago Obama was the president of the United States". That proposition is false simpliciter (it is not true that 1000 years ago Obama was the president of the United States). But if they did not have a content that is (now) false those (future) beliefs would not qualify as correct, as they intuitively do.

But now we have a deeper explanation of why *Relative Correctness* holds. Instead of postulating the truth of *Relative Correctness* 'by fiat', we can show it to be a consequence of the sensitivity of BELIEFS to truth simpliciter and the general metaphysical principle that mental states have a disjunctive nature. EP seems to me to have no comparable resources.

Notice also that the basic idea that this solution relies on – that of distinguishing neatly between principles that apply to mental states and principles that apply to MENTAL states – can be used to solve other apparent puzzles. For instance, it may be asked how any subject S other than Giovanni can possibly *know* himself to be special given that knowledge is factive and that, according to SVM, only Giovanni is special. The answer at this point should be obvious. One needs to distinguish three thesis. The first concerns KNOWLEDGE and says that:

(*FACTIVITY*) If someone KNOWS a proposition p, then p is true simpliciter

Given that only Giovanni has KNOWLEDGE, this thesis only applies (non-vacuously) to what Giovanni knows. The second thesis, that is implied by the first given the disjunctive real definition of knowledge in terms of KNOWLEDGE, says that:

(*Factivity**) If someone knows a proposition p, then p is either true or otherpersonally true.

And the third thesis, based on the assumption that for every subject there is one and only one point of view from which that subject's mental states are MENTAL states, says that:

(*Relative Factivity*) For any subject s, if s knows a proposition p then p is true from s's point of view.

Given *Factivity**, there is no incompatibility between SVM and the supposition that a subject S other than Giovanni knows himself to be special. Given *Relative Factivity*, it is clear what has to be the case if S knows himself to be special: all it has to be the case is that S is special from S's point of view.[28]

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[28] Some might object that *Relative Factivity* constitutes a radical departure from a principle whose truth should be regarded as unquestionable, namely:

(*Factivity*) If someone knows a proposition p, then p is true simpliciter.

Now, it's not clear to me that the linguistic evidence concerning the use of "know" and other epistemic predicates is incontrovertibly in favour of *Factivity*, rather than *Relative Factivity*. But even granting that it is, there are several things that subjectivists can do to alleviate worries that their take on the ordinary notion of knowledge is radically

4. The Subjectivist and the Mainstream View of the Mental

Let us take stock. In § 1, I defended the intelligibility of Subjectivism, the general doctrine that reality is only subjectively the way it is. In § 2, I explained why, in so far as I trust my intuitions, I am naturally led to embrace a particular version of Subjectivism, SVM. Finally, in § 3, I argued that SVM is superior to the only other unequivocally subjectivist theory I know of, Hare's Egocentric Presentism. Central to SVM is the idea that, from each subject's point of view, all and only the mental states of that subject are MENTAL states. Initially, I treated the notion of a MENTAL state as primitive, explicating it solely by means of metaphors and examples. But then, along the way, I offered various ways of substantiating that notion. In particular, I explained how MENTAL states can be defined (for every mental state m, the corresponding MENTAL state is that state X such that, essentially, to be in m is to be either in X or to be otherpersonally in X) and how the notion of a MENTAL state relates to other theoretical notions (MENTAL states are those whose correctness conditions, if they have any, are tied to truth simpliciter in the most straightforward manner).

But now consider the following alternative to SVM, which embodies what I shall call the "*Mainstream View of the Mental*" (MVM, hereafter):

> Reality contains many things: mountains and rivers, plants and animals, stars and planets. Among the many things it contains, there are subjects who enjoy mental states: beliefs, hopes, desires, feelings and the like. Although these subjects resemble or differ from one another in many respects – including the mental states they enjoy – ultimately they are all 'on a par': no subject is such that his or her mental states are, in any important metaphysical respect, special or different from all the rest.

MVM is *simpler* than SVM, because it doesn't require us to posit a plurality of points of view. And it's also more *egalitarian* than SVM, because it doesn't require us to draw any distinction between subjects with mental states and subjects with MENTAL states. So those who are altogether skeptical about the justificatory role of intuitions will be wondering what *reasons* I have for preferring SVM

revisionary. First of all, they can accept that *Factivity* is true when restricted to the class of objective propositions (i.e. the propositions that are true from all points of view if true at all). Secondly, they can point out that, once it is allowed that the world I inhabit is different from the one you inhabit (i.e. that the world is only subjectively the way it is), *Relative Factivity* is pretty much all we need to capture the intuitive idea that knowledge is the kind of state of mind whereby subjects are successfully related to the world they inhabit. Last, but not least, they can notice that, with respect to the task of vindicating *Factivity*, subjectivists are no worse off than standard subject-relativists: any subject-relativist who thinks that subject-relative propositions (e.g. the proposition *that chocolate is tasty*) can be known will need to replace *Factivity* with something along the lines of *Relative Factivity*.

to MVM: intuitions aside, what's the evidence in favour of SVM and against MVM?

In this last section, I will try to provide an answer (or, at least, the beginning of an answer), by arguing that certain philosophical puzzles that arise within the framework of MVM can easily be solved (or dissolved) if one adopts SVM. For obvious reasons, my discussion will be limited both in scope and ambition. The problems I will focus on are not the only ones where SVM delivers interesting philosophical results – I chose them merely for their prominence in the modern debate in the philosophy of mind. And, while I will argue that these puzzles have no easy or obvious solution within the framework of MVM, I do not mean to suggest that they are *unsolvable* unless one adopts SVM. My aim is not to refute MVM, but only to show that there are questions to which SVM has readily available answers that are simpler and more elegant.

4.1. The Unity of Consciousness

The first problem I want to consider is the problem of the unity of consciousness. There are two ways of stating this problem, one of which is the flip side of the other. On the one hand, it may be asked what makes certain mental states – all of my mental states, for instance – *coalesce* into a single mental life: what is the 'glue' that keeps together my beliefs and my hopes, my desires and my fears, my feelings and my experiences? In virtue of what is my consciousness *unified* in the way it is? Alternatively, it may be asked what makes it the case that some mental states – your mental states and my mental states, for instance – do *not* coalesce into a single mental life: what kind of 'chasm' separates my beliefs, hopes, desires, fears, feelings and experiences from your beliefs, hopes, desires, fears, feelings and experiences? In virtue of what is the mental realm *divided* in the way it is? Putting the two sides together, one could say that the problem of the unity of consciousness is the problem of explaining why "every mind is like a world apart" (Leibniz 1989, 144): a *foreign territory* from the perspective of any other mind and yet a *unified world* from its own perspective.

At first sight, this problem has an easy solution. It is standard to think that mental states do not float in a vacuum: wherever there is a mental state, there is also a subject undergoing it. Maybe what unifies all my mental states is the fact that there is just *one* subject, myself, who undergoes all of them. And maybe what separates my mental life from yours is simply the fact that you and I are numerically distinct subjects. Maybe subjects (be them Cartesian souls or physical objects in the ballpark of bodies and brains) are the "'pegs' around each of which [...] to *aggregate* a stream of consciousness *separate* from all others" (Hellie 2013, 307; my emphasis).

This 'easy' solution is far from unproblematic. Kant argued (convincingly, according to many) that from a mind having unified consciousness, absolutely nothing follows concerning the numerical unity of anything.[29] By treating the unity of consciousness as the unity of a thing (be it a Cartesian soul or a physical object in the ballpark of bodies and brains), we fail to do justice to this point, while effectively ruling out certain prima facie possible scenarios – a single subject having disunified consciousness or (more speculatively, perhaps) two or more subjects having unified consciousness.

These observations prompted the search for alternative solutions. Some have said that I bestow unity upon my mental life by making it the object of a single act of introspection: the unity of consciousness is, so to speak, in the eye of the introspecting subject.[30] But this answer is riddled with difficulties. For one thing, it seems outlandish to suppose that the unity of consciousness would break down if I ceased to pay introspective attention to it. For another, the introspective act by which I bestow unity upon my mental life is itself part of my mental life: what is responsible for *its* coalescing with the rest of my mental life?

Others have proposed to understand the unity of consciousness in mereological terms. One option is to say that the unity of consciousness is a matter of mereological *simplicity*: at any one time, a subject undergoes only one experience, with no proper parts (Tye 2003). Another is to say that the unity of consciousness is a matter of mereological *composition*: a subject's mental life is the fusion of all his or her experiences (Bayne 2010). But both options come at significant cost. In the first case, one has to deny that my current itch and my current headache are *two* distinct events – certainly a surprising and rather undesirable result. In the second, one needs to explain why my itch and my headache fuse into a single experience, whereas my itch and your headache don't – a task not less challenging than the one we started with.

Yet others have suggested that we should regard the unity of consciousness as a sui generis phenomenon, to be accounted for by positing a sui generis relation of 'co-consciousness' among mental events (Dainton 2000). But there is certainly something ad hoc about this move. And the ad hocness is all the more uncomfortable given that what we are trying to explain is not a secondary or relatively rare phenomenon, but a basic and pervasive feature of the mental realm.

The problem of the unity of consciousness has been the object of a historically long-standing and intense debate among defenders of MVM and I cannot do proper justice to the complexity of that debate here. What I want to do is show why, if one adopts SVM, one can simply *sidestep* the problem. If SVM is correct, *nothing* is needed to keep a subject's mental states together or to

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[29]   See Brook (2013) for a discussion.
[30]   A version of this strategy is pursued by Rosenthal (2003).

separate the mental life of one subject form the mental life of another: different mental lives are simply grounded in different points of view. Let me explain.

Call any two mental states "point-mates" if they 'glow' from the same point of view, i.e. if there is a point of view from which they are both MENTAL states. My mental states are all point-mates – that's what makes my mental life so unified. Your mental states are all point-mates – that's what makes your mental life so unified. My mental states and your mental states are *not* point-mates – that's what creates such a deep chasm between your mental life and mine. From each point of view, the same warmth and intimacy that makes one's mental states MENTAL states "runs through them all like a thread through a chaplet and makes them into a whole, which we treat as a unit, no matter how much in other ways the parts may differ *inter se*" (James 1950, 334). As to mental lives that do not share that warmth and intimacy from any point of view – yours and mine, for instance – they are forever disunified – forever foreign to one another, as one might put it.

It is important to note that nothing in this account rules out that (in other possible worlds, if not in the actual one) the unity of consciousness might not correspond to the unity of a subject: in principle, the relation of being point-mates could hold among mental states of two or more subjects and fail to hold among the mental states of single subject. And it is equally important to note that the relation of being point-mates is not one that SVM has to make any special provision for. Just as temporaneists say that two events are simultaneous (or 'time-mates') when it is sometimes true that they both occur, and just as contingencists say that two events are compossible (or 'world-mates') when it is possibly true that they both occur, subjectivists can say that two mental states (or events) are point-mates when it is either true or otherpersonally true that they are both MENTAL states (or events).[31] By their lights, a satisfactory account of the unity of consciousness requires only what a general satisfactory theory of the mental already gives us: the distinction between mental states and MENTAL states and the general idea that reality manifests itself through a plurality of subjective points of view. If these latter hadn't been abolished from our worldview and if the distinction between mental states and MENTAL states hadn't been obliterated, the problem of the unity of consciousness would never have arisen.

4.2. The contents of self-awareness

The second problem I want to consider has to do with the contents of self-awareness. Here

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[31] Notice that, by analysing the relation of being point-mates in this way, subjectivists comply with Kant's idea that the unity of consciousness is not the unity of a thing.

by 'self-awareness' I mean the kind of awareness one ordinarily has of one's mental life and by 'contents of self-awareness' I mean the range of facts one becomes apprised of courtesy of this awareness. The problem I am interested in arises from the need to reconcile two equally compelling theses about the contents of self-awareness.

The first thesis is that the contents of self-awareness are somehow 'subjectless', i.e. that they do not contain, or mention, or otherwise make reference to, any specific subject. Hume subscribed to that thesis when he wrote that:

> For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other […]. I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. (Hume 1978, 252)

But the thesis is more standardly associated with Lichtenberg, who said that:

> We know only the existence of our sensations, representations and thoughts. *It thinks*, we should say, just as one says, *it lightnings*. To say *cogito* is already too much if we translate it as *I think*. (Lichtenberg 2012, 152)[32]

Several considerations can be adduced in support of this thesis. First of all, there is much phenomenological plausibility in what Hume and Lichtenberg say: when a mental state is considered "from the inside" (or "from the first-person perspective", as philosophers sometimes say) it certainly does not *seem* to have an owner – a prima facie indication that, in being aware of one's mental states, one is not aware of *oneself* undergoing those mental states. Secondly, some philosophers (and Lichtenberg among them) have appealed to the fact that the contents of self-awareness are subjectless to explain what is wrong with Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* argument: it is because one is not aware of oneself undergoing this or that conscious state that, contrary to what Descartes thought, "mere consciousness of a conscious state does not on its own warrant a belief in the existence of the subject of the conscious states" (Hossack 2006, 228). If the contents of self-awareness were not subjectless, those of us who think that Descartes committed a fallacy when he claimed to have proved his own existence 'from the armchair' would have to find some alternative reason of why his argument failed (and it is difficult to see what that reason might be). Finally, it has been argued that if the contents of self-awareness were not subjectless, judgments formed on the basis of self-awareness would also not be subjectless. But, as Wittgenstein pointed out in a famous

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[32] What we have in these two passages is not the view that subjects do not exist (i.e. that they must be eliminated from our ontology). It's just the view that subjects do not enter the facts that one is aware of in being aware of one's mental life (i.e. that subjects must be eliminated from the contents of self-awareness).

passage of the *Blue Book*, judgments formed on the basis of self-awareness are not vulnerable to all the errors that non-subjectless judgments are vulnerable to – in particular, they seem to be immune to error through misidentification.[33] If the contents of self-awareness were not subjectless, this unusual immunity would call for explanation. Not so if the contents of self-awareness are subjectless.

The second compelling thesis about the contents of self-awareness is that, whether or not they are subjectless, they must somehow concern the subject who is self-aware, as opposed to any other subject. In effect, more than a substantive thesis about the contents of self-awareness, this is an analytic truth, following from how self-awareness has been characterized: if self-awareness is awareness of *one's* mental life, how could the contents of self-awareness fail to concern the subject who is self-aware, as opposed to anyone else? How could the contents of self-awareness be *impersonal* (i.e. not dedicated to the properties of a single subject), if they are to be contents of *self-*awareness?

Now, it's easy to see why, if MVM is correct, the two theses I've outlined are in tension with one another. For MVM does not draw any distinction between mental facts (i.e. facts involving the ascription of mental states) and MENTAL facts (i.e. facts involving the ascription of MENTAL states). So, if MVM is correct and the contents of self-awareness are subjectless, there's simply no alternative to construing them as subjectless mental facts. But subjectless mental facts are perfectly impersonal: for example, the subjectless mental fact *that there is a headache* (or, à la Lichtenberg, *that it is headaching*) does not concern me or you or anyone else in particular – it obtains whenever someone has a headache, no matter *who* he or she is. So we are stuck with the following dilemma: either the contents of self-awareness are not subjectless or they are impersonal. If they are impersonal, it's no longer clear in what sense they are contents of self-awareness. If they are not subjectless, all the evidence that they are must be explained away one way or another.

I do not want to suggest that defenders of MVM cannot work their way out of this predicament. All I want to say is that this predicament can be *avoided* if one adopts SVM. Instead of saying that the contents of self-awareness are subjectless mental facts (e.g. the fact *that there is a headache*), defenders of SVM can say that they are subjectless MENTAL facts (e.g. the fact *that there is a HEADACHE*). Subjectless MENTAL facts are not impersonal: from the point of view of any subject S, any subjectless MENTAL fact obtains when and only S is in the corresponding MENTAL states. So by construing the contents of self-awareness as subjectless MENTAL facts we can have our cake and it eat too: we can maintain that it it is *our* mental life that self-awareness gives us access to, but we

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[33] Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in this phenomenon. See, for instance, Prosser and Recanati (2012).

can also do justice to Hume's and Lichtenberg's phenomenological insight that through self-awareness "we know only the existence of our sensations, representations and thoughts". This now also puts us in a position to explain what wrong with Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* argument, while pre-empting any questions concerning the immunity to error through misidentification of mental self-ascriptions.

4.3. Experiential knowledge

The third and last problem I want to discuss is the problem of experiential knowledge. Here by 'experiential knowledge' I mean knowledge of experiential facts. And by 'experiential' facts I mean facts concerning what it is like to undergo this or that experience. Once again, the problem arises from the conflict between two theses, both of which look prima facie compelling.

The first thesis is that, if a fact is objective, one can in principle share one's knowledge of that fact with other subjects. For example, suppose I know *that the fridge is empty.* And suppose it is objectively true that the fridge is empty. Then there seems to be no reason why one should not be able to come to know that the fridge is empty by relying on my testimony. After all, an objective fact is a fact that obtains from every point of view. And if a fact obtains from all points of view – if it is *there* according to *any* way the world manifests itself to *anyone* – what kind of 'barrier' could possibly prevent one from transmitting one's knowledge of that fact to others? There may be some provisos: we should probably require that the recipients of testimonial knowledge be well-disposed to know and possess the relevant intellectual capacities. And there may be some exceptions: for every p that is objectively true and actually unknown by S, the fact *that p and S doesn't know that p* is 'structurally unknowable' (and, a fortiori, intransmissible) to S, its objectivity notwithstanding. But the qualifications do not invalidate the general principle. And the exceptions seem to be exceptions that prove the rule: where there is objectivity, there is certainly a strong presumption in favour of transmissibility.

The second thesis from which the problem of experiential knowledge arises is that experiential knowledge does not seem to be transmissible through testimony: in some important sense, we cannot share experiential knowledge with other subjects. To illustrate, consider a particular kind of experiential knowledge, knowledge of what it is like to see red. While many of us possess this kind of knowledge, we would not be able to share it with just any other individual. In particular, we would not be able to share it with a congenitally blind person or (to use an example made famous by Frank Jackson (1982)) with a scientist who had spent all of her life in a black-and-

white room, reading black-and-white books.[34] And this is not just because we do not have enough words to express to others what it is like to see red (although that may also be true). Nor is it because the individuals in question are not well-disposed to know or are intellectually impaired in ways that thwart their acquisition of testimonial knowledge (they may happen to have other kinds of physiological impairments that prevent them from having 'first-hand' knowledge, but that is, arguably, not the point). It is rather because experiential knowledge is essentially 'firstpersonal': you can only attain it by yourself, abandoning (if you can) the condition of inexperience you find yourself in. As Leibniz puts it:

> We cannot explain what red is to a blind man, nor can we make such things clear to others except by leading them into the presence of the thing and making them smell, see or taste the same thing we do, or, at the very least, by reminding them of some past perception that is similar. (Leibniz 1989, 24)

It is obvious why, if MVM is true, the two theses I've outlined – that objective knowledge is in general transmissible and that experiential knowledge is not – call for some reconciliatory work. Unlike SVM, MVM does not recognize the existence of any subjective fact. So if MVM is correct and there is such a thing as experiential knowledge, it cannot but be knowledge of objective facts of some sort. The problem then arises of explaining why, unlike objective knowledge in general, experiential knowledge cannot be transmitted through testimony. Some will say that it's because experiential knowledge requires a special kind of 'acquaintance' with experiential properties – a kind of acquaintance that cannot be easily passed on from one subject to another.[35] Others will say that it's because experiential knowledge requires the possession of certain exquisitely experiential (or 'phenomenal') concepts – concepts that cannot be expressed linguistically nor possessed deferentially.[36] Another strategy would be to downplay the problem by pointing out that there are other objective domains (e.g. aesthetics) where only 'direct' or 'first-hand' evidence is conducive to knowledge.[37] But one might also solve the problem at the root by denying that experiential knowledge exists at all or is factual in nature (this is what advocates of the so-called 'ability

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[34] Frank Jackson wanted his thought-experiment to show that experiential knowledge cannot be derived from physical knowledge (not even of the most detailed and complete sort). But I agree with Lewis that the key intuition concerns the impossibility to transmit experiential knowledge to the inexperienced, not the impossibility to derive it from our knowledge of physics: "Our intuitive starting point wasn't just that *physics* lessons couldn't help the inexperienced to know what it's like. It was that *lessons* couldn't help."(Lewis 1990, 482).

[35] See Conee (1994).

[36] See, for instance, Chalmers (2003) and Hellie (2004). For a critique of the idea of a phenomenal concept, see Ball (2009).

[37] It was Kant who famously argued that aesthetic knowledge cannot be based on testimonial evidence: "The approval of others affords no valid proof, available for the judging of beauty" (Kant 2007, 114).

hypothesis' have argued).[38]

This is not the place for a detailed examination of these strategies – I am not interested in arguing that they fail to deliver what they promise or that they introduce unnecessary complications in the epistemology of mental facts. All I want to say is that, if one adopts SVM, one will find these strategies *superfluous*. For SVM is already committed to there being facts whose knowledge cannot be transmitted to others, and already has a straightforward explanation of their intransmissibility – an explanation that appeals to the subjective nature of the facts in question.

To illustrate, consider my knowledge of the fact *that I have a* HEADACHE. According to SVM, there is just one point of view from which that fact obtains, namely the firstpersonal point of view (recall: from any point of view other than the firstpersonal one, I have no MENTAL states). Given that one can only know a certain proposition when that proposition is true from one's point of view,[39] it follows that no subject other than myself can know *that I have a* HEADACHE (he or she may know *that I have a headache* and *that otherpersonally I have a* HEADACHE, but that's a different matter). So I cannot share my knowledge of the fact *that I have a* HEADACHE with other subjects – the reason being, quite simply, that I am the only subject from whose point of view it is a fact that that I have a HEADACHE. One could say that the glowing side of *my* mental life is something of which *I* am destined to be the only witness (more or less in the same way in which, according to some versions of Temporaneism, the event of *this* instant being present can be witnessed by us *now*, but has never been witnessed by anyone in the past and will never be witnessed by anyone again in the future).

Advocates of SVM can treat experiential knowledge as just another instance of this general phenomenon, which they regard as integral to the very nature of the mental. They can say that experiential knowledge cannot be shared with others for the simple reason that, contrary to what has traditionally been assumed, experiential facts are subjective rather than objective. On the resulting account, when you and I know what it is like to see red, we know something which is not true (and, therefore, is not there to be KNOWN) from the point of view of a congenitally blind person or of someone like Frank Jackson's Mary. Now, of course, subjectivists face – just as much as anyone else in this debate – the daunting task of explaining what it is that you and I know when we both know what it is like to see red. But, whatever their answer is going to be, it's not going to require us to postulate the existence of 'phenomenal concepts' or exotic 'acquaintance' relations or unprincipled restrictions on the validity of testimonial evidence. Once it is recognized that reality is only subjectively the way it is – that certain truths need not be *truths* from every point of view – the problem of experiential knowledge ceases to require special treatment.

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[38] See Lewis (1990) and Nemirow (1990).
[39] This is the thesis I called "Relative Factivity" at the end of § 3.

5. Conclusions

There is a long tradition of thinking that, whichever way reality is, it must be objectively that way. The idea is that there may be subjectivity in how we apprehend or evaluate reality, but not in how reality is in and of itself – subjectivity may affect our perceptions and opinions, but it simply does not run as deep as to shape the *facts*.

What I've been trying to show in this paper is that there might be good reasons to revisit that tradition. There is nothing intrinsically incoherent in the notion of a subjective fact. And the particular version of Subjectivism I have put forward has three important advantages. The first is that it accords well with certain deep-seated intuitions that each of us has about his or her own place in reality. The second is that, by locating the source of metaphysical subjectivity in the nature of mental states, it is better placed than other versions of Subjectivism to cope with the challenges that every such theory faces. The third is that it holds out the promise of solving (or dissolving) certain philosophical puzzles that the objectivist conception of the mental is saddled with. None of this proves Subjectivism or the Subjectivist View of the Mental to be right. But it does seem to me more than enough to show them worthy of serious consideration.*

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