

*What I am to Myself: A Philosophical Analysis of Self-Awareness and
Subjectivity*

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Abstract

One of the central topics discussed throughout the history of philosophy has been the discussion of ‘Self’. On a similar note, the notion of self-awareness also has always been a central topic of discussion. There are so many fundamental philosophical questions regarding the nature of self-awareness and its relation to the world. Self-awareness standardly refers to the knowledge of the self. We get to know about the self because there is a salient *sense of the self* that we all possess. We can never deny that we have a *sense of the self*. While we discuss self-awareness, it is also important to consider the notion of subjectivity. The reason behind that is, an individual's unique self-awareness gives rise to a particular kind of subjectivity. Hence, just as every experienced phenomenon demands a proper explanation in philosophical discourse, this unique sense of self and its subjectivity also demand a full explanation. Hence, my main research problem in this thesis revolves around finding out the nature of self-awareness and subjectivity. My thesis has aimed at providing an answer to a very basic yet shadowy question that is, how an individual is represented to herself?

In order to explore the nature of self-awareness and subjectivity, I have freely adopted ideas discussed by many renowned philosophers belonging to analytic philosophy, phenomenology, and existentialist trends, throughout this

whole thesis. The thesis contains five main chapters along with an introductory and a conclusive chapter.

The first chapter begins with an exploration of the various accounts of self that we encounter. It is named “**An Overview of Different Accounts of Self-Awareness**”. In this chapter, we discuss various possible ways of apprehending self-awareness. It has been upheld in the thesis that there may be at least four possible ways in which self-awareness can be understood. Firstly, we can consider the self as an ontological category, the awareness of which leads us to the path of liberation. Secondly, we can consider self-awareness to be merely the momentary awareness of our occurrent mental states. Thirdly, we can have a theoretical knowledge of self to apprehend what sort of an entity it is. Fourthly, we can perceive self-awareness as a form of self-experience or self-hood. In this thesis, I am only concerned about exploring the essence of the fourth alternative of self-awareness. This form of self-awareness is the awareness that builds my identity to myself. It also helps to qualify or characterize all my experiences as exclusively mine. We shall be talking about a form of self-awareness that makes a subject an ‘I’ to her own self, meaning, it appears as a continuous presence of self-hood qualified with the aspect of *‘for-me-ness’*.

In the second chapter, we discuss how the awareness of the self is constituted and structured for a subject. The chapter has been named “**The Constitution of Self- Awareness**”. While discussing the structural constitution of self-awareness, we also learn about the pre-reflective and reflective layers self-awareness. We correspondingly discuss that the experience of self-awareness may happen in two ways, namely, pre-reflectively and reflectively. However,

in both these kinds of awareness, there is a co-existence of a constant-mindedness and a conditioning of the other. A self-aware subject can be pre-reflectively aware or reflectively aware of her existence and self-experience but all those experiences possess a *'for-me-ness'* and at the same time they are in some way or the other moulded by the other. Someone may ask, how is the intervention of the other possible in the pre-reflective layer? My answer to this question would be that the 'me' in any form of for-me-ness comes with the otherness from the 'other' built into it. So, any form of for-me-ness, be it pre-reflective or reflective, presupposes the recognition of the other. After that, we have also attempted to learn that the reflexivity of self-awareness sometimes plays a very important role in order to constitute a complete sense of 'I'. In the reflexive nature of self-awareness, my awareness is represented by myself to myself. Thus, it creates a sense of immediacy in the self-experience. So, a relation of identity is revealed in the reflexive essence of self-awareness. Furthermore, I have tried to demonstrate that along with these inter dimensions of pre-reflective and reflective self-awareness, the outward bodily and physical aspects of an individual also have significant contributions in constituting our self-awareness. Our body is the most important medium through which we experience the world and our world-embeddedness gets constructed. Hence, we must accept that the self is embedded in the physical world with so many other subjects which also mould some layers of awareness of ourselves.

In the third chapter, we analyse the language we use to refer to self-awareness, focusing on the term "I." The chapter is named **“Understanding the Indexical ‘I’**. In this chapter, we attempt to shed some light on the different aspects of the use of the indexical 'I'. I think that the discussion about the

indexical 'I' has been important for my research because the use of the indexical 'I' exemplifies that an individual is self-aware and she is referring to herself in and through this self-awareness. I have supported Elizabeth Anscombe's in this context that 'I' may not be the proper name. It definitely does not refer to some Cartesian ego. It is neither a direct identity proposition where 'I' directly identifies itself with a proper name. It is rather a two-step process that involves two identity propositions. In the first step, we realize that 'I am something'. This step involves being self-conscious, self-ness, and being in conscious subjective mode of existence. In the second step, we equate this 'I' with a proper name. However, the usage of 'I' indexical does not necessarily require the second step (second identity proposition) to be accomplished. Even if the second step identity is missing, there can be a perfect and correct usage of 'I', only if the subject is self-conscious. Furthermore, I have proposed that 'I' refers to this mode of being self-conscious or self-aware. It refers to self-ness. Then I have proceeded to say that, there can be two ways of referring while using the indexical 'I'. One is the subject usage and the other is the object usage. The use in the sense of a subject is ubiquitous use and its referent is immune to error through misidentification whereas, the object usage is secondary and there can occur some sort of misidentification in referring to oneself. I have also endorsed the view that the subject usage of 'I' is a logical pre-requisite of the object usage of 'I'. I have also suggested that maybe, both these uses of indexical 'I' are associated with some sort of descriptive content. Various ways of being aware of oneself may suggest some descriptive content associated with the indexical 'I'. After that, we proceed to learn that the shift of meaning or referent is possible in the case of indexical 'I' because the referent

of 'I' is not an absolute fixed entity. The indexical 'I' rather has a common function or apparatus to play for every subject. Now, if we say that the indexical 'I' is playing the same kind of functional tool for every subject then can we still accept that states of self-awareness are private in the way Cartesian theory has taught us to believe? If the same thing happens to all of us, how can it still be private? I have attempted to answer this issue by saying that it is better not to claim that self-awareness is private. 'Private' is a very resilient quality to ascribe. It indicates that it is ungraspable. However, that is not true in the practical world. We can actually empathize with another subject because we are also familiar with the experience of being a subject. Nevertheless, instead of accepting privacy, what we can say is that all the subjects have peculiar access to the constant-mindedness that we saliently feel.

In the fourth chapter, we discuss how emotion as a mental phenomenon is considered to be a very significant aspect of our mental repertoire. It has been named "**The Role of Emotion in Constituting Self-awareness**". Here I have spoken about my firm conviction that emotional experiences have a great impact on the constitution of our self-awareness. This chapter makes an attempt to demonstrate how the emotional states build up the self-awareness and the self-image of an individual. I have claimed that there might be some distinction between the basic and non-basic emotions, from a biological and psychological perspective. However, I have advocated that self-awareness or self-understanding is enhanced by both kinds of emotions, be it basic or non-basic. The role of the non-basic, self-conscious, complex emotions in the constitution of self-awareness is very easy to determine because in these cases, the self-conscious emotions are manifested explicitly in the meaty layer of our self-

awareness of an individual. This involves emotional concepts and complex cognitive evaluations that provide concrete information about the individual. On the contrary, the basic emotions are primitive, pre-reflective, implicit and non-verbal. However, the so-called basic emotions also shape a substratum of our self-consciousness. This emotional experience is equivalent to one's conscious existence. In an emotional encounter with the world, it is the state of emotion that constitutes the very mode in which an individual would apprehend the world around him. Interestingly, this primitively emotional conscious existence is tented with our self-awareness. Even if there is a basic emotion in an individual that is extremely devoid of any cognitive appraisal, so much so that it exists in a completely non-reflective or pre-reflective level; even then the state of emotion would have a certain function to do in shaping our self-awareness.

In the fifth chapter, we examine the concept of subjectivity through the lens of our understanding of self-awareness. The name of the fifth chapter is “**Subjectivity Reassessed**”. In this chapter, we directly address the issue regarding the essence of subjectivity. After exploring the nature of self-awareness, I have attempted to provide a tractable, account of subjectivity in my thesis. I have discussed that there is something it is like for a subject to go through a conscious experience. Usually, in the light of Cartesian philosophy, subjectivity is considered to be strictly private and is only accessible to the subject herself. I have proposed to change this perspective. I have tried to retain the notion of subjectivity without retaining the notion of privacy. I have suggested that the crux of subjectivity lies in the *for-me-ness* of every awareness an individual has. I have further clarified that I believe that the

phenomenon of subjectivity arises from three constituents, namely, the body of the subject, the reflexivity of self-awareness, and the coexistence of *me-other* perspective of an individual. The me-other perspective refers to the ability of a subject to take upon both first-person and third-person perspectives at the same time. I, as a subject, get immediately aware of my own self-awareness and at the same time, I can also adopt a third-person perspective to see myself as *another* to another subject. This ability qualifies the subjectivity of an individual as unique. The self-intimating and self-manifesting nature that comes from the reflexivity of self-awareness makes it immediately, peculiarly, authoritatively, groundlessly, and non-inferentially presented to the subject herself. This indeed seems to be a very important aspect of subjectivity. Furthermore, the kind of self-awareness that I have been discussing so far also indicates bodily subjectivity to a great extent.

The thesis begins by exploring various possible perspectives on the notion of self-awareness. In this context, I argue that my focus is on exploring the unique way in which a subject represents herself to herself. Within this discussion, I emphasize the importance of the concept of "for-me-ness" in self-awareness. I then proceeded to discuss the structural constitution of self-awareness in a subject. After that, I examined the relationship between the indexical "I" and self-awareness, and I then explored how the indexicality of "I" contributes to the uniqueness of self-awareness. Thereafter, I explored the role of emotional mental states in shaping self-awareness. Subsequently, I tried to offer an understanding of how subjectivity is formed within an individual while being self-aware.