The Irreducible Subjectivity of Consciousness and its Metaphysical Consequences

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Abstract

This thesis examines how contemporary metaphysical frameworks address Thomas Nagel's challenge regarding the subjective nature of consciousness. His claim that subjective experience—what it is like to be a conscious being—cannot be fully captured by objective, third-person descriptions suggests that consciousness may consist (in part) of irreducible first-personal, subjective facts. Responding to this, several philosophers have proposed frameworks within what can be termed *first-person realism*, each offering a unique approach to integrating subjective facts as irreducible aspects of reality. Through a comparative exploration of these frameworks' arguments, I evaluate their ability to preserve the privacy and irreducibility of subjective experience, and what the metaphysical consequences of doing so entail.

Introduction

Subjective experience is real, exclusively first-personal, and not so obviously explainable. Can you, for instance, describe in exact terms what it feels like to hear your favorite song? Not just the melodies or harmonies, the cultural resonance it carries, the neural activity it elicits, or the psychological and physiological responses it triggers, but the raw, direct phenomenal experience—and the mental state that accompanies it—of specific soundwaves unfolding within your conscious landscape. Regardless of one's answer, an explanatory gap quickly becomes evident as a result of this challenge.

Think, for instance, about Bolivia—the country I grew up in. It is the poorest nation in Latin America and stands as an excellent example of the struggles and contradictions of the continent's post-colonial history. Its cultural response—the collective experience of pride and redemption on the one hand, and of loss and injustice on the other—is best exemplified by what we colloquially refer to as *malegría*, from the Spanish *mal*—which means bad or wrong—and *alegría*—which means happiness or joy. It can roughly be described as a unique and bittersweet combination of joy and sorrow—a nostalgic melancholia of sorts. Upon perception, however, it evokes a very specific and distinct mental state in each individual. In my case, it encapsulates a unique state of affairs: a first-personal blend of memories and sensations anchored to certain sounds, smells, people, and importantly, my Bolivian upbringing. This irreducibly subjective experience, I argue, constitutes a genuine matter of fact—a type of fact, however, that obtains exclusively for the experiencing subject, and that hence demands further exploration.[1]

In other words, the states of affairs we can measure, model, and agree on—the *objective* fact of the matter, if you will—while not completely isolated, remain separate from the ones we experience first-personally—the *subjective* fact of the matter. It therefore becomes clear that "[t]he task of a science of consciousness […] is to systematically integrate two key classes of data into a scientific framework: third-person data, or data about behavior and brain processes, and first-person data, or data about subjective experience." (Chalmers 2004, p. 1111) While cognitive scientists have long been dealing with the former, my investigation focuses on the latter, namely, on the subjective 'what-it's-likeness' of experience, and the first-person *perspective* it embodies. With this in mind, I ask:

How are we to understand the metaphysical structure of the subjective character of experience?

As it turns out, the phenomenological tradition has managed to explore and assess the subjective, intentional, and intersubjective nature of consciousness to a remarkable degree, allowing us to reach conclusions about the constitution of ourselves as objectively existing subjects who by interacting intersubjectively, inhabit the objective spatio-temporal world. Subjectivity, moreover, is a built-in feature of experiential life (Zahavi, 2017) and it seems, therefore, that it must take center stage in any discussion regarding conscious experience.[2] However, the analytical rigor of 20th century philosophy of mind has, in many ways, constrained the degree to which we can rely on these intuitions.

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[1] In other words, "[…] your experience involves a world that includes the subjective fact—the manifestation of reddishness by the rose [for instance]—as well as the fact that this manifestation is what the world is like to you." (Lipman 2023b, p. 541).

[2] Notice, however, that when accepting these sorts of claims, we need not embrace the notion of a subject as a separate or detached 'self' existing independently of perception or experience. In fact, the concepts of a metaphysical subject or 'self' have long resisted precise definition within analytic philosophy of mind. For our current purposes, I will

That is, the persistence of conflicting theoretical positions—physicalist, dualist, and so on—in reconciling consciousness's counterintuitive features with a coherent ontology underscores a pressing challenge, namely, that while dismissing the epistemological weight that subjective experience brings with it would simplify our theorizing of the world, it would also entail overlooking the very phenomenon we are trying to investigate. Consciousness is invariably mediated by the subject that experiences it, and it may hence be the one area of philosophical inquiry in which the subjective / objective dichotomy need not be, or better put, cannot be upheld: it seems like the more we attempt to reduce all our descriptions to purely public and objective ones, the more we are confronted by their insufficiency.

In this thesis, I argue that objective facts alone fail to describe the full nature of consciousness, and therefore, that a metaphysical framework that integrates and evaluates subjective facts is needed. As it turns out, recognizing such facts leads one to 'first-person realism', the view that "[...] for any conscious subject, there are first-person facts, such as, in my case, the fact that I am currently in a particular experiential state." (Builes 2024, p. 12). In the next parts, I examine various approaches to this claim, ultimately arguing against those that risk solipsism, and in favor of a 'fragmentalist' understanding of reality.

By embracing the realism and plurality of subjective experience without privileging any particular standpoint, subjective facts offer a robust foundation for understanding the metaphysical structure of consciousness. What is uncontroversial at least, and what I take as my starting point, is that there is something about my current experience that is innately mine, and innately real. It is my version of *malegría*, as real as ever to me, and as strange as ever to you.

Part 1: The Irreducible Subjectivity of Consciousness

Readers acquainted with the philosophy of consciousness will recognize the influence of Thomas Nagel's (1974) work in my discussion above, where I have been drawing on his assertion that an objective, third-person perspective is incapable of capturing the first-person, subjective quality of consciousness. In other words, by asking 'What is it Like to Be a Bat?', Nagel takes the intuitions that I presented above, and states that the subjective nature of conscious experience imposes fundamental limitations on our ability to understand it through objective means.

He builds a thought experiment that begins by asking us to consider what it would be like to experience the world as a bat, whose sensory and perceptual apparatus are evidently radically different from ours. Bats navigate their environment through echolocation, which is a sensory modality that is completely foreign to humans, plausibly impossible to visualize. So, even if we were to know every physical detail about a bat's brain and sensory processes, we would still be unable to grasp what it is like to *be* a bat. Not because we lack the necessary objective, physical information, but because "[w]ithout some idea [...] of what the subjective character of experience is, we cannot know what is required of a physicalist theory." (p. 437)

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assume a subject to be a referential *point of view* to which every subjective phenomenon is necessarily tied, and "[...] it seems inevitable that an objective physical theory will abandon that point of view." (Nagel 1979, p. 167) The experiential dimension of selfhood—what Zahavi and Kriegel (2015) call 'for-me-ness'—is an intrinsic *feature* or *process* of experience itself, not a detachable or separable entity. It is precisely this self-referential structure of conscious experience, however, that makes an experience uniquely *mine*, and that consistently pushes me to identify with it and attribute to it a separate, 'soul-like' ontological status. Moreover, given the diversity of vocabulary employed, I use *subject*, *standpoint*, *perspective* and *point of view* interchangeably, unless explicitly mentioned.

In this way, Nagel helped frame subjectivity as a locus of interest for contemporary philosophers and cognitive scientists alike—granting, of course, the long historical tradition that this debate already had. David Chalmers (1995), for instance, mentions Nagel's influence in his formulation of the 'hard problem of consciousness', which describes the difficulty in explaining how and why physical processes in the brain can give rise to subjective, phenomenal experience—the so-called 'explanatory gap'.

Furthermore, Chalmers' (2018) 'meta-problem of consciousness' describes a research project set up to understand why we perceive consciousness as puzzling in the first place. The meta-problem "is the problem of explaining problem intuitions: intuitions that reflect our sense that there is some sort of special problem involving consciousness, and especially some sort of gap between physical processes and consciousness" (Chalmers 2018, p. 11). Thus, it examines the cognitive and psychological mechanisms that lead us to formulate the hard problem in the first place, and to see consciousness as inherently mysterious.

Evidently, the subjective nature of consciousness seems to pose a pressing problem, one that has grown and adapted to fit into the cracks of the many arguments we have thrown at it, not least in Western analytic philosophy. Therefore, I now turn to contemporary work on the topic, and approach it through frameworks that aim to unpack and build upon the sort of observations that Nagel makes.[3]

The Nature of Subjective Facts

I will assume—for the remainder of this thesis—that a non-reductionist incorporation of subjectivity into any discussion surrounding consciousness is of considerable importance; that the subjective nature of conscious experience is tied to there being subjects who act as 'standpoints' (Lipman, 2023a) relative to which certain facts obtain. In this way, the very existence of conscious experience implies that it is—at least in part—constituted by irreducible first-personal, subjective facts. My aim in the following sections is to motivate this claim and shed light on these concepts.

The notion of what constitutes a fact has proven to be far more intricate than one might initially assume. For our current purposes, however, I adopt an understanding of facts as 'obtaining states of affairs' (Husserl 1973, Wittgenstein 1922). Under this interpretation, a fact is a concrete occurrence (or non-occurrence) of a particular configuration of objects, properties, and relations in the world; a state of affairs that makes a proposition true.[4] What is important, moreover, is that the contents of propositions describing states of affairs can, in theory, be fulfilled not only by objective, but also by subjective ones; *what is the case* is not exclusively an objective matter. In turn, describing a certain fact as the state of affairs that obtains only for me whenever I hear a particular song—which granted, many will find controversial—makes complete sense if we understand it as merely another flavor of fact; one that, as its objective counterpart, can make judgments, beliefs, and propositions true.

Conventionally, however, we do rely on facts precisely because they serve us to strive for objectivity and impartiality. For example, the fact that 'I, Vincent Kuijper, am sitting right now' pertains specifically to me as a speaker but is equally true from any point of view. And indeed, it is this universality that seems to affirm their status as facts. However, what about propositions pertaining to subjective states of affairs, such as 'red wine is tasty', or 'this feels like *malegría*'? No one would deny that this can be a true proposition describing a state of affairs if one indeed happens to find red wine tasty, or if one happens

[3] Here, again, I remind the reader of my research question, namely, 'how are we to understand the metaphysical structure of the subjective character of experience?'

[4] What exact notion of *factivity* we want to employ will, nevertheless, depend on the assumptions we make. I will turn back to this in the following parts.

to be ‘feeling’ *malegría*. Still, most would resist classifying them as facts since, while it may be true for some and false for others, its truth lacks the universality that we seek. Without an absolute standard to ground such claims, calling them facts seems to become problematic:

> “[...]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.” (Merlo 2016, p. 311 - 312)

This, however, need not be the case, nor does it need to distract us from the initial plausibility that subjective facts deserve. When comparing them to other kinds of facts that are commonplace in contemporary metaphysics, David Builes (2024), for instance, states:

> “We can understand “subjective” facts in an exactly similar fashion to how we understand contingent facts and temporary facts. [...] A subjective fact is a fact that obtains according to some points of view but does not obtain according to others. An objective fact is a fact that obtains according to all points of view. In general, “points of view” play an analogous role to “worlds” and “times”.” (p. 2)

To me, it is a genuine, undeniable fact that red wine is tasty. It is not objective, nor universal, nor can it be studied empirically. Yet, it remains a fact nonetheless, anchored to the lived reality of my subjective, first-personal experience. Again, without this *type* of fact, no description of the world can ever be complete, “just as other philosophers maintain that no description of the world is complete without mentioning irreducible tensed or modal facts.” (Builes 2024, p. 12) The obtainment of a subjective state of affairs for specific a standpoint—the *mental* state of affairs, if you will—either obtains or it fails to do so, and a subjective fact captures this per definition.

Still, I acknowledge that the incorporation of subjective facts into any coherent metaphysical picture raises a profound challenge: it seems to beg the question as to how reality could be structured to encompass them without lapsing into contradictions and incoherence. Given this difficulty, there is considerable pressure to deny that subjective facts obtain at all. However, beyond direct experiential considerations, there are also stronger argumentative reasons to affirm their reality. In the next section, I turn to one such argument, namely, Frank Jackson’s ‘Knowledge Argument’.

A ‘Knowledge Argument’ for Subjective Facts

In ‘What Mary Didn't Know’ (1986), Jackson presents a hypothetical scientist named Mary who knows everything there is to know about the physical processes underlying human color vision—namely, every detail of physics, chemistry, and neurophysiology, as well as all the causal, functional, and relational information that arises from these disciplines—while confined to a black-and-white room. Jackson argues, “[i]f physicalism is true, she knows all there is to know. For to suppose otherwise is to suppose that there

is more to know than every physical fact, and that is just what physicalism denies." (p. 291) Yet when Mary leaves the room and finally experiences color, she does in effect gain new knowledge.[5]

In this way, Jackson's famous 'Knowledge Argument' challenges the completeness of physicalism by arguing there is a kind of knowledge (subjective, phenomenal knowledge) that is not captured by physical knowledge—that is, there exists knowledge that goes beyond *all* the physical facts. There is an epistemically oriented interpretation (Horgan 1984)—which is purely about a certain type of knowledge—that seems to strongly point to the existence of subjective facts while not explicitly addressing them. What I am interested in, however, is the ontological version (Horgan 1984) which while controversial, strikes me as plausible, and which indeed points to the existence of a 'further' type of fact:

> *Premise 1:* Mary knows all the physical facts concerning human color vision before her release.
>
> *Premise 2:* Upon seeing color, Mary learns new 'further' facts about human color vision that she did not know before.
>
> *Conclusion:* There are 'further' facts about human color vision.

By 'further', I do not imply that these facts are superior, more real, or hierarchically distinct; rather, I mean that they represent a different *type*, *kind*, or *category* of fact that goes beyond our traditional conceptualization of what a fact can be. Regardless, these arguments are concerned with claims against physicalism, pointing to its inadequacy in providing a complete account of reality, rather than to its outright falsity (List 2023). In light of this, I find Howell's (2007) ontological formulation particularly appropriate. Namely, he contends that although Mary had complete objective information while confined—that is, knowledge of all the objective facts—her experiences upon leaving the room revealed 'further' information—that is, 'further' facts. Therefore, objective information alone is insufficient for a full understanding of reality.

If true, then the critiques that remain will in part come, not from a *naturalistic* fallacy, but from an *objectivist* one—from the mistaken belief that objectivity is the sole necessary condition for facthood. The ontological version concludes that 'further' facts exist, and Howell argues that these are non-objective—with their nature remaining up to interpretation. Moreover, some closely related premises lead me to an even stronger conclusion, namely, that these 'further' facts are specifically subjective:

> *Premise 1*: Mary knows all the objective, third-personal facts concerning human color vision before her release.[6]
>
> *Premise 2*: Upon seeing color, Mary learns new facts about human color vision that she did not know before, because she experiences them first-personally.[7]

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[5] This brings to mind a statement by Bertrand Russel (1927): "It is obvious that a man who can see knows things which a blind man cannot know; but a blind man can know the whole of physics. Thus the knowledge which other men have and he has not is not a part of physics." (p. 389)

[6] By 'objective and third-personal' I mean the a-perspectival, 'view-from-nowhere', empirically verifiable facts.

[7] By 'first-personally' I mean necessarily tied to the first-person, subjective experience. I will come back to the perspectival nature of this in the last part.

Premise 3: If Mary learns new facts when she experiences them first-personally in addition to all the objective, third-personal facts there are, then she learns further non-objective, first-personal facts that are tied to her experience.

Conclusion 1: Therefore, Mary learns non-objective, first-personal facts about human color vision tied to her subjective experience.

Premise 4: If Mary learns non-objective, first-personal facts about human color vision, then she can also learn other non-objective, first-personal facts tied to the entirety of her subjective experience.

Conclusion 2: Therefore, Mary learns non-objective, first-personal facts about human consciousness tied to a subject's experience.

Premise 5: If Mary learns non-objective, first-personal facts tied to a subject's experience, then those first-personal facts only obtain from her point of view once she experiences them.

Conclusion 3: There are first-personal facts about consciousness that only obtain from a subject's first-person point of view.

Premise 6: If facts only obtain from one's own first-person point of view, then they are subjective facts.

Conclusion 4: There are subjective facts about consciousness.

The conclusion, moreover, seems—at least *prima facie*—plausible, especially considering that it is neutral about the status of many theoretical positions relevant to our current discussion. The crux of the matter is that one learns new facts tied to one's conscious experience *because* those subjective facts come to obtain. Thus, even "[p]hysicalists should accept that there are subjective facts, and they should deny, therefore, that all facts are objective" (Crane 2002, p. 3).

Let me take stock of my argument so far: I started out—endorsing Nagel's position—by elaborating on why objective facts are insufficient for a complete picture of conscious experience, highlighting how conventional metaphysical claims do not seem to do it justice. I then proposed an alternative picture that accommodates a reality where conscious experiences consist (at least in part) of first-personal, subjective facts, and presented my version of the knowledge argument—positing that if some facts only obtain from one's own first-person point of view, then they are subjective facts—to motivate their adoption. As it turns out, if one does so, then one becomes a 'first-person realist', for whom the reality of these facts is 'local' or 'restricted' exclusively to subjects.

Part 2: The Quadrilemma

Although I approach this investigation by swimming against traditional currents—given that first-person realism is admittedly a widely controversial stance—my claim is actually quite straightforward. The question remains, however, as to what this entails for our ontological commitments and how we are to

understand and treat the nature of subjective facts. Luckily, Christian List's (2023) quadrilemma for theories of consciousness frames and addresses these worries in detail:

> "There are four […] plausible claims that we might expect any satisfactory metaphysical and/or scientific theory of consciousness to be consistent with—namely, 'first-person realism', 'non-solipsism', 'non-fragmentation', and 'one world'—but these four claims are mutually inconsistent. Any theory can retain at most three of them at once and must give up at least one." (p. 1)

As I already stated, 'first-person realism' follows when one accepts—or becomes a realist about—first-personal, subjective facts. Next, 'non-solipsism' refers to the negation of solipsism, a position that roughly claims only one's mind is sure to exist. Hence, 'non-solipsism' claims that more than one conscious subject is real. Continuing, 'non-fragmentation' is the negation of fragmentation, or more specifically, of a position called fragmentalism—the view that reality is not a single, unified metaphysical whole, but is instead composed of distinct fragments. Therefore, 'non-fragmentation' holds that the totality of facts is compossible. Lastly, 'one world' claims that reality is composed of only one world, as opposed to many.

Thus, according to the quadrilemma, and given that we are embracing first-person realism, three important questions arise when we accept first-personal facts: First, are there, besides mine, other conscious minds? Secondly, is the world internally coherent or internally fragmented? And lastly, is there one objective world as opposed to several subjective ones? Indeed, others have similarly proposed ways of reconciling several initially plausible and ultimately conflicting propositions that a metaphysical theory of consciousness might aim to accommodate, yet not as explicitly structured as List. Thus, the quadrilemma serves us greatly as an expository framework.

In what follows, I explore different contemporary authors' views and illustrate the correspondence between their positions and the different horns of the puzzle.[8] Regardless of whether one starts from the epistemological observation that objective accounts of conscious experience are incomplete, or from a metaphysical assumption about what it means for a subject to inhabit a mental state (Lipman, 2023b), they all focus on reconciling subjective facts with a broader metaphysical picture. I will present their ideas first largely without critique, reserving my deeper analysis for Part 3 of this thesis.

Merlo's Subjectivist View of the Mental

In his paper 'Subjectivism About the Mental', Giovanni Merlo (2016) presents subjective facts by focusing on the distribution of certain mental properties among individuals; the 'Subjectivist View of the Mental' (SVM), as he calls it. He frames his story around the aim of dissolving philosophical puzzles that have to do with the contents of self-awareness, the unity of consciousness, and the intransmissibility of experiential knowledge, and starts elaborating on his intuitions about the plausibility of subjectivism, by building an analogy with contingent and temporary facts—just as we saw Builes do. For Merlo, these analogies are "encouraging because if there is 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." (p. 312).

[8] I choose these authors, moreover, not only because List mentions them in his own paper, but also because they constitute a small group of analytic philosophers that have been seriously engaging with first-person realism in the last few years.

Contingencism holds that reality is only contingently the way it is, meaning that some propositions (namely those that correctly describe reality) do not do so necessarily. That is, "[s]ome propositions are true simpliciter without being true in all possible worlds." (p. 3) Temporaneism, by analogy, holds that reality is only temporarily the way it is, meaning that "[s]ome propositions are true simpliciter without being true at all times." (p. 4) Consequently, for instance, temporary facts hold or obtain at certain times, but not eternally—'the tree has orange leaves' might be true now but not in spring. Subjectivism, then, holds that reality is only subjectively the way it is. Thus, some propositions accurately describe reality but only do so subjectively; they are "true simpliciter without being true from all points of view." (p. 4) Importantly then, analogous to necessary truths being true in all possible worlds and eternal or permanent truths being true at all times, objective truths are only those that are true across all points of view.

The notion of a point of view, however, must go beyond perceptual perspectives or opinions. That is, just as possible worlds are ways reality could manifest itself, and times are ways reality has manifested in the past or will do so in the future, points of view are irreducibly subjective manifestations of reality. And thus, equipped with this initial plausible analogy, Merlo goes on to develop the notion of SVM, essential to which is the idea that I, Vincent—or Giovanni, in his case—am somehow *special*. He characterizes the view as follows:

> "Reality contains many things [including] 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." (p. 13)

Specialness, which is also a subjective notion, seems to be the key idea here. That is, even if Merlo does not deny his resemblance with other people, he is *special* in so far as, "[o]f all fears and all desires [for instance], Giovanni's fears and desires are [...] FEARS and DESIRES: they are fears and desires par excellence because they make their objects truly and quintessentially fearsome and […] desirable." (pp. 319 - 320) This, he argues, also applies to other intentional mental states, as well as to non-intentional ones: his beliefs, hopes, thoughts, experiences, and feelings are BELIEFS, HOPES, THOUGHTS, EXPERIENCES, FEELINGS, and so on.

According to this picture, Vincent's mental states, and only Vincent's mental states have some sort of quintessential or unmistakable *glow*, *vibe*, or *closeness* to them that in fact makes them MENTAL states to me. This strikes me as a plausible claim: the *specialness*—which resembles the notion of 'for-me-ness' or 'what-it's-likeness'—is of subjective character, and it aligns with many of my intuitions about my everyday experience. Still, it also contradicts many other intuitions I have about my conscious experience, namely, that I am *not* unique, and that I am just *lucky* to be having the experiences that, while subjectively real, are but one example of the instantiation of subjective facts in all conscious subjects.

This, to me, seems to better be captured by the 'Mainstream View of the Mental' (MVM), which characterizes reality as containing—in addition to the typical things we observe, such as mountains, trees, and stars—subjects who inhabit mental states. Importantly, though they may "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." (p. 332)

Nevertheless, Merlo frames SVM, not as a refutation of MVM, but as a simpler and more elegant explanation for certain aspects of the mental realm, claiming that "[…] given Subjectivism, reality is not objectively the way it is, so which point of view gets to be privileged is, itself, a subjective matter" (p. 324). This is quite a bold claim, and Merlo indeed addresses possible objections regarding the seemingly arbitrary nature of privileging one's own perspective. Again, based on the symmetry of similar issues in the metaphysics of time and modality, he argues that a 'many-worlds' or a 'fragmentalist' interpretation of SVM could address this worry:

> 'I add [...] 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 would be to adopt a conception on which the totality of what is most fundamentally the case extends beyond the totality of facts [...]. Alternatively, one could take all points of view to be on a par vis-a-vis truth simpliciter by treating them as different 'fragments' of an overall incoherent totality of facts [...]. My own preference goes to the first strategy - the second runs the risk of undermining the sense in which I am special vis-a-vis all other subjects.' (p. 324)

Merlo is advancing a particular subjectivist thesis, rather than explicitly dealing with first-person realism. This, he argues, is because subjectivism (as he construes it) and first-person realism differ due to Fine's 'particular notion of reality'. Indeed, if I am a first-person realist, then my mental states *are* metaphysically special. Yet they are, in a certain sense, not *uniquely* special: my experience is special to me—which constitutes a subjective fact that only obtains for me—just as your experience is special to you—which constitutes another subjective fact that only obtains for you—with no single perspective holding an objectively 'superior' position within the totality of reality. In effect, it is this particular notion of reality that I am particularly interested in; in how subjective facts are accommodated across the world, and what their place is in said reality.

From this, we can conclude that Merlo adopts the first-person realist position, while at the same time relaxing[9] (or to a certain extent rejecting) the non-solipsism one. He does, however, hint at the possibility of instead relaxing non-fragmentation and perhaps one-world, while not settling on a definitive answer. His *specialness*, however, seems to lead us into a form of solipsism that becomes, in my eyes, difficult to defend. What is clear, nevertheless, is that he takes first-person, subjective facts to constitute the subjective character of experience.

Hare's Egocentric Presentism

Caspar Hare (2009) lays out an argument for what he terms 'Egocentric Presentism' (EP). Since I already addressed Merlo's views, and given that I elaborated on his idea of SVM, let us gloss over what he says about Hare's EP:

[9] I borrow the term 'relaxing' or 'relaxation' from List's (2023) own quadrilemma. What I mean when I say that someone 'relaxes' a horn of the quadrilemma, is that they have a noticeable tendency to lean into its negation. That is, if someone relaxes non-solipsism, then they have solipsistic tendencies in their work. They do not reject it, but they do not necessarily embrace it either.

> "If I were an Egocentric Presentist instead of a defender of SVM, I would endorse a picture along these lines: Reality contains many things [namely] 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) 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 [do so] instead." (p. 326)

Hare's argument comes down to the fact that most of us naturally value our own pains and pleasures more than the pains and pleasures of others—which he describes through the notion of 'Mild Egocentric Hedonism' (MEG). Indeed, only *I* can experience *my own* pain, which (as I repeated *ad nauseum*) is not reducible to third-person, objective descriptions.

Hare claims that most views that try to reconcile this intuition with the apparent metaphysical symmetry of pains and pleasures remain unsatisfactory, which he calls the 'Inadequacy of Alternative Views': if one rejects MEG, then one has no reason to value their own pains and pleasures over those of others. And while this is theoretically appealing, it clashes with our basic understanding of how human beings function. Alternatively, Hare proposes, one should accept 'Unjustified Asymmetry', which states that one should still be a mild egocentric hedonist despite no underlying metaphysical difference between one's own and others' pains and pleasures. EP in turn aims to offer a metaphysical justification for MEG.

With this in mind, he presents EP—with the aim of offering a metaphysical justification for MEG—as an analogue to the A-Theory of time, both views being driven by the intuition that there's something metaphysically special about *here* and *now*. In his framework, the distinctive feeling of *presence* associated with one's own experiences (which is absent when considering the experiences of others) plays the central theoretical role. For instance, one of the most intriguing challenges to our understanding of personal identity arises in fission scenarios (thought experiments), where a single person is split into two or more distinct individuals. That is, imagine you have survived a train crash in which, after being unconscious for some time, you wake up and cannot recall your personal history or name. You are, however, informed that there are two survivors, A and B, and that A is about to undergo excruciatingly painful surgery; naturally, you find yourself hoping to be B. Thus, though you may possess all relevant objective information about the situation—details about the crash, the surgery, and the identities of A and B—there remains a crucial epistemic gap in deciding who you are. What you lack is not any objective fact about the world, but your subjective position within it.

Still, are A's experiences the present ones then, or are B's? Our intuitions often seem divided in these sorts of situations. From a first-person perspective, it might *prima facie* feel possible for the original 'self' to survive in either of the resulting bodies, as both could seem to carry forward elements of the person's consciousness. However, when we shift to a third-person point of view, the situation appears more complicated, as it seems that survival should be impossible: the original person cannot physically exist in two places at once, yet the fissioned individuals are two distinct entities.

According to EP, the case in which A's experiences are present is fundamentally distinct from the case in which B's are, even if from an objective perspective the two scenarios are identical. If EP is true, then 'I' always refers to the locus of the present conscious experience, and thus, it captures the first-personal urgency of hoping to be B, grounded in said presence. In other words, it holds—similarly to Merlo's view—that reality contains a special subject, namely, you (or Caspar, or Vincent, or Giovanni), and just as presentism emphasizes the reality of the present moment amidst an otherwise complete description of

temporal facts, EP deals with the reality of present experience amidst an otherwise complete description of objective facts.

While EP does not fully resolve the tension between egocentric concerns and the moral prioritization of 'the greater good' (to put it rather simplistically), it reframes the issue by suggesting that one's own pain matters, not simply because it is one's own, but because its presence is intrinsically significant within the evaluation of what is 'good' simpliciter. And in this way, EP offers a metaphysical justification for MEG; one's pains and pleasures are special *because* they are present.

Hare's argument is compelling in many respects, but it leaves crucial questions unanswered, particularly regarding the nature and implications of what presence actually means. That is, he treats it as a fundamental yet undefined property that sets one's experiences apart. Its precise metaphysical status and explanatory scope remain quite obscure and even question-begging. Moreover, like with Merlo's SVM, I recognize a potential worry about the arbitrariness of one person's perspective being metaphysically privileged over the others: if presence is the sole criterion for metaphysical significance, EP might imply that only *my* current experiences matter or are real; that the external world and other minds might not exist outside my own. Thus, if I am first-person realist, my experiences are indeed present for me. Yet they are not, in some sense, *uniquely* present: my experience is present to me—which constitutes a subjective fact that only obtains for me—just as your experience is present to you—which constitutes another subjective fact that only obtains for you—with no single presence commanding the totality of reality.

In sum, we can assume Hare's commitment to first-person realism, and as with Merlo, his relaxation (or possible rejection) of non-solipsism. Furthermore, he seems to embrace non-fragmentation and to somehow relax one-world, at least *prima facie*. His emphasis on *his* presence, however, also seems to risk solipsism, and thus, something one should be aware of. As with Merlo, it is evident that he considers first-person, subjective facts to be a fundamental aspect of what defines the subjective nature of experience.

Lipman's Standpoint Metaphysics

Martin Lipman (2023a, 2023b) introduces the concept of 'Standpoint Metaphysics' as a way to frame and understand subjective facts—which is part of a broader effort to tackle perspectival phenomena and their metaphysics. He starts by pointing out that we seem to have a strong intuition about some facts somehow obtaining relative to certain standpoints or perspectives—or as he puts it, that "[b]eing conscious makes one a standpoint" (p. 531). In the end, for instance, whether licorice is tasty depends on the individual tasting it, and whether an event is in the past, for instance, depends on the time of evaluation. More specifically, he suggests that a central metaphysical issue surrounding subjective facts lies in understanding the relationship between two kinds of facts: 'objective fact' p that obtains for all subjects, and 'subjective fact' $@s(p)$ that obtains for some standpoints ($@s$) but not for all.

Lipman states that "[...] the phenomenal appearances that accompany mental states are somehow only there, or only real, from the standpoint of the subject of those mental states. The world differs across subjects in terms of which appearances obtain." (p. 530) That is, reducing 'licorice is tasty' to 'licorice is tasty to someone'—from a third-person perspective—or to indexical facts, for instance, will not do the trick. For Lipman, thus, in order to accommodate consciousness in the world, reality must somehow be structured by multiple standpoints, and by some sort of facts that can only obtain relative to those standpoints—which could be times, subjects, locations, conceptual schemes, and so on: necessarily, x is a standpoint if and only if there is some p such that $@s(p)$. Indeed, we already seem to refer to each other as

subjects, standpoints, perspectives, or points of view in common parlance. Metaphysically speaking, however, this notion becomes quite more problematic.

That is, as I mentioned when dealing with Merlo and Hare, the possibility of multiple standpoints (and of potentially contradictory facts) raises a key issue related to the scope of factivity, namely, the principle that if something is true relative to a standpoint, then it's true *simpliciter*. Unrestricted factivity—where everything true relative to any standpoint is true absolutely—leads to incoherence if contrary facts hold relative to different standpoints, prompting Lipman to explore restricted forms of factivity (while not settling on a definitive answer). If factivity is unrestricted, then me being 'the special one' and my experience being 'the present one' is true absolutely, which, if there are other minds besides my own, cannot be the case.

While Lipman offers several potential strategies for addressing these issues, he remains deliberately neutral as to which option ultimately provides the best resolution. He does, however, hint at a framework to understand the nature of these facts and their place in this seemingly 'fragmented' reality.

Drawing from Kit Fine's (2005) 'Tense and Reality', Lipman (2015) states that "fragmentalism questions the deeply ingrained presumption that the world is a unified place, and that it cannot include incompatible facts" (p. 3120). So, rather than privileging someone's specialness or presence, Lipman suggests a neutral approach in which these subjective facts obtain in different fragments. As Fine puts it in 'The Question of Realism' (2001), "[t]ruth is one thing, metaphysical status another." (p. 3)

From this, we can conclude that Lipman embraces both the first-person realist horn, as well as the non-solipsist one. He does, moreover, hint at the rejection of non-fragmentation and the acceptance of one-world. Just as his colleagues do, he takes first-person subjective facts to be, at least in part, constitutive of the subjective quality of experience. In what follows, I dive into Fine's fragmentalism, followed by Lipman's further development of it, saving my description of his position for after.

Fine's Fragmentalism

'The Reality of Tense' (2006) is Fine's attempt to defend a non-standard form of tense realism, which he calls 'fragmentalism'. A tensed fact is one whose truth value depends on temporal indexicals—such as now, yesterday, or tomorrow—which inherently situate it within a specific time. For example, 'it is raining now' is a tensed fact because its truth is anchored to the present moment—in which, as it turns out, it is indeed raining (unsurprising given that I am writing this in the Netherlands). Fragmentalism thus arises as a response to the perceived problems of standard tense realism, which holds that reality is fundamentally tensed; that tensed facts are what constitute reality.

Fine argues that the standard realist picture faces difficulties reconciling the intuitive plausibility of tense with certain metaphysical principles, leading to incoherence. Fragmentalism, he argues, avoids these problems by rejecting the idea that reality is a unified, coherent whole, in the way we traditionally conceptualize it. Now, Fine doesn't spend much time dealing with first-person realism on its own, but he does provide a good analogy, which indirectly engages with the worries I raised regarding Merlo's and Hare's ideas. That is, if I were a first-person realist, then "[…] it would appear to be quite absurd to suppose that a particular person, myself, was privileged and that reality was somehow oriented towards the first-personal facts that held for me, though not for you." (p. 401)

He starts out by addressing the question of what it means to be a realist about tense, and argues that standard formulations of tense realism, such as the A-theory of time, face challenges in articulating a coherent and metaphysically sound view. Fine suggests that the debate hinges on the concept of reality

itself, and how tensed facts fit into our understanding of it. He introduces four key metaphysical principles that are central to the debate about tense realism, which he traces back to McTaggart's (1908) argument—and which loosely resemble List's quadrilemma.[10]

Let me briefly sketch the picture: (1) Realism states that reality is constituted, at least in part, by tensed facts. For example, the fact that 'KF is sitting' is a tensed fact that can be said to be true in reality. (2) Neutrality states that no time is privileged; the tensed facts constituting reality are not oriented towards one time over another. For instance, both 'Aristotle is sitting' and 'KF is sitting' can be true in reality, even though they refer to different times. (3) Absoluteness states that tensed facts obtain absolutely, not relative to a certain time. For example, 'KF is sitting' is true in reality without needing to specify 'at which time' KF is sitting. (4) Coherence, lastly, states that the tensed facts that constitute reality are coherent, meaning they are logically compatible and can coexist without contradiction. With this in mind, Fine goes on to argue that these four principles are incompatible, leading to a fundamental tension in the standard picture of tense realism:

> "For it follows from [tense] Realism that reality is constituted by some tensed fact. There will therefore be some time *t* at which this fact obtains. Now Neutrality states that reality is not oriented towards one time as opposed to another. So reality will presumably be constituted by similar sorts of tensed facts that obtain at other times. But this means [...] that some of these facts will have incompatible contents. If reality is constituted by the present fact that I am sitting, for example, then it may well be constituted by the subsequent fact that I am standing. By Absolutism, reality is absolutely constituted by such facts; and this is then contrary to Coherence (and the underlying assumption of Absolutism)." (p. 400)

Fine also presents a modal analogue of the problem, suggesting that attempts to reduce tensed facts to modal facts face similar issues with incompatibility and coherence. This evident need for a solution leads him to propose a non-standard form of realism "[…] characterized by a combination of views, [namely] Realism and Neutrality, that are not usually taken together. It will suppose both that reality is tensed and that it is not oriented towards one time, the present, as opposed to another. Thus even though we may stand outside of time, as it were, without adopting any particular temporal standpoint, we may still think of temporal reality as being constituted by tensed facts." (p. 401) If on top of this one rejects the principle of Absolutism, one arrives at a form of relativism. If one rejects Coherence, however, one arrives at fragmentalism:

> "The fragmentalist is not holding the strange view that I can at the same time be both sitting and standing. He is holding a different strange view, which is that reality can be absolutely constituted by both facts, even though these facts do not obtain at the same time and even though there are not subject to temporal qualification." (p. 402)

Fine himself acknowledges that this might seem counterintuitive, as it posits a fragmented and potentially incoherent reality. He therefore tries to distinguish fragmentalism from other non-standard views (such as Putnam's internal realism and Goodman's pluralism) and emphasizes that, while for the fragmentalist reality is fragmented, our language and thought processes are always situated within a specific fragment,

[10] Fine's principles, as I mentioned, loosely resemble List's quadrilemma: (1) Realism is similar to the 'first-person realism' horn. (2) Neutrality seems analogous (to a certain degree) to the 'non-solipsism' horn. (3) Absoluteness is somewhat similar to the 'one-world' leg. (4) Coherence echoes the 'non-fragmentation' leg.

preventing us from encountering contradictions directly. Therefore, the apparent incoherence of reality doesn't lead to problems with truth or meaning, as these are always assessed relative to a specific fragment.

Before stating his ultimate position, however, I want to explore some of the conceptual ambiguities in Fine's framework through Lipman's further development of it.

Lipman's Fragmentalism

Lipman (2015) offers a critical analysis of Fine's original fragmentalist formulation and proposes a revised version that addresses some issues he identifies. "If the world is fragmented, then the fact that ML is sitting obtains and that the fact that ML is standing contains, but—though each fact obtains—they do not, in a certain sense, co-obtain. That is the central claim of the fragmentalist view that I want to propose." (p. 3126) While Fine rejects the principle of coherence as a global constraint on reality, he still relies on it to determine which facts belong to the same fragment. The precise nature and criteria of this primitive coherence relation, however, remain underexplored. And accordingly, Lipman's first issue has to do with the nature of said relation. He points out that Fine's formulation seems ambiguous and potentially problematic and distinguishes different ways in which reality could be contradictory: Option I is that the same fact both belongs and doesn't belong to reality ($\Re A$ and $\neg\Re A$). Option II is that it is the case in reality that A, and it is the case in reality that not-A ($\Re A$ and $\Re\neg A$).

Lipman argues that Option I is unacceptable given that "[e]ither fragmentalism is committed to a rejection of classical logic, or this is not the way reality is incoherent according to [it]" (p. 3122). Option II, while avoiding logical problems, requires denying the factivity of reality, which is not desirable because "[w]hen we deny factivity [...] we lose a natural understanding of what reality consists in. [In this case] [s]ome facts belong to reality without being the case at all, and what belongs to reality is not a subset of what obtains. Or, to put it informally, some of the things that belong to reality are not facts" (p. 3122)

Ultimately, Lipman argues that Fine's account is too vague to distinguish clearly between compatible and incompatible facts. In response, he proposes a revised version of fragmentalism built on the notion of co-obtainment, a 'primitive' relation[11] that holds between facts. Instead of describing facts as simply 'belonging to reality', Lipman focuses on whether facts co-obtain, by using "[…] a sentential operator '$\circ$' to form sentences of the form 'A$\circ$B', which we read as 'A insofar as B'.

For example, 'Sophie is sitting $\circ$ the tree is leafless' says that Sophie is sitting insofar as the tree is leafless." (p.) Co-obtainment, Lipman argues, must hence be characterized by the following logical features: First, by symmetry, $A\circ B \vDash B\circ A$. Second, by associativity, $A\circ(B\circ C) \vDash (A\circ B)\circ C$. Third, by non-transitivity, $A\circ B$ and $B\circ C \nvDash A\circ C$. Fourth, co-obtainment does not satisfy simplification, meaning that $A\circ B \nvDash A$. And lastly, by failure of adjunction, A and $B \nvDash A\circ B$, which importantly highlights the contingency of co-obtainment: compatible facts may or may not co-obtain.

Lipman also argues that a negative fact, $\neg A$, is true if and only if the positive fact, A, does not obtain, which ensures that the law of non-contradiction holds even in a fragmented world. "In particular, contradictory sentences A and $\neg A$, are never both true. A negative claim $\neg A$ is true if and only if A is not true." (p. 3131) Thus, the incompatibility between facts is explained in terms of their inability to co-obtain. Two facts, A and B, are incompatible if and only if it is not the case that AB. Therefore, Lipman is allowing for a clearer distinction between incompatible facts (which cannot co-obtain) and contrary facts (which may

[11] Lipman (2015) states that "[a]s in the case of Fine's notion of coherence, co-obtainment is proposed as a primitive notion, and hence we incur the burden of elucidating it" (p. 3126), which he neatly does.

or may not co-obtain), showing, in my opinion, how the fragmentalist can accommodate seemingly contradictory facts without falling into logical incoherence:

> "Whenever two facts fail to co-obtain, i.e. when ¬(A○B), this means that the one fact, the other fact is not there at all, i.e. it means that A obtains insofar as B does not. That does not mean that A and B are not each of them the case, it only means that they are not the case together, that they do not make for a unified chunk of world." (p. 3128)

Importantly, Lipman emphasizes that his framework doesn't endorse an incoherent view of reality. Contradictions are avoided by distinguishing between obtaining and co-obtaining, and by carefully specifying the logic of co-obtainment. And this need not be too controversial when properly understood, as "[a]gain, fragmentalism is not the view that there literally speaking are entities called fragments relative to which thing obtain, it is solely the views that certain facts co-obtain and others do not." (p. 3129)

Thus, Lipman elucidation of Fine's views shows their views as embracing the first-person realist horn and deliberately rejecting the non-fragmentation one. They steer clear from the solipsistic tendencies of their colleagues by embracing non-solipsism, and their ideas do not necessarily require many worlds—an approach that the next author appears to challenge. Both, however, clearly regard first-person, subjective facts as playing a crucial role in shaping the subjective character of experience—explicitly in Lipman's case, and implicitly in Fine's.

List's Many Worlds

List's paper on 'The Many-Worlds Theory of Consciousness' (2022) introduces a metaphysical framework that also tries to reconcile subjective facts with a coherent understanding of reality—the many-worlds theory. Drawing on ideas from modal realism, centered-worlds accounts of indexicality, and earlier presentist theories of consciousness, he proposes a picture where different conscious subjects are associated with distinct and real 'first-personally centered worlds', while also positing a shared 'third-personal world' that encompasses the non-subjective features of reality.

> "[A third-personal world] can be defined as the totality of all facts that hold at that world from a third-person perspective [—] the "view from nowhere" in Nagel's terms. The present definition is a version of Wittgenstein's famous dictum [...] "[t]he world is the totality of facts, not of things". Amending Wittgenstein's wording, we might say: "the third-personal world is everything that is the case third-personally", where "something that is the case third-personally" is a "third-personal fact." (pp. 10 - 11)

List directly addresses the limitations of standard, 'one-world' theories of consciousness in capturing the subjective and perspectival nature of experience. And he elaborates a picture of a world centered around a specific *locus* of subjectivity, which encompasses the phenomenal or subjective facts and experiences associated with a particular standpoint. Analogous to centered worlds in the philosophy of language, these worlds capture the first-person perspective and indexical nature of conscious experience.

Contrast this with the more traditional 'one-world' model, which implies a world encompassing the non-subjective features of reality. By embracing a version of David Lewis' (2001) modal realism[12], or at least a framework that resembles it in some respects[13], List argues that the conscious experiences of different subjects are equally real (grounded in subject-specific centered worlds), even though only one is present for each. Meaning that a subject has *their* particular experiences rather than someone else's due to a particular centered world being present for *that* particular subject.

> "The ordered pair (ω,π) […] encodes the totality of facts that hold at the world ω with π placed inside it as the locus of subjectivity. Returning to Wittgenstein's characterization of "the world", we can say that "a subject's first-personally centred world is everything that is the case for that subject": everything that is the case at (ω,π)." (2022, p. 14)

This encompasses both the complete set of third-person facts that would appear in an exhaustive, objective description of the world a subject inhabits, as well as the full range of subjective facts specific to that subject. Furthermore, "[w]e are not merely providing an account of a subject's epistemic state. Facts that the subject knows or is aware of will be among the facts that hold relative to the subject, but they do not exhaust them." (p. 14). Scientific theories of consciousness can, therefore, be integrated into this framework by understanding them as specifying which physical or functional properties in the third-personal world give rise to corresponding *loci* of subjectivity.

List delineates which pairs of third-personal worlds and *loci* are nomologically possible, constituting the set of all first-personally centered worlds (Ω_{phys}). He asks, "[h]ow, in particular, should we think about the metaphysical relationship between third-personal facts and first-personally centred facts, both of the "pure" and of the "mixed" sorts distinguished earlier? My suggestion is that we can associate them with two different ontological levels. Crucially, the level of first-personally centred facts turns out to be subvenient and the level of third-personal facts supervenient, not the other way around." (p. 21)[14] This means that each first-personally centered world can be seen as a 'realizer' of the third-personal world, with multiple 'realizers' being possible, which in turn ensures that consciousness doesn't supervene on third-personal properties.

He also uses the concept of philosophical zombies, which are hypothetical beings physically identical to conscious humans but lacking conscious, phenomenal experience—that is, by definition there is 'nothing it is like' to be a zombie—to explore the hard problem of consciousness. He argues that the many-worlds theory allows for a coherent interpretation of the thought experiment by understanding it as a description of this leveled ontology where the first-personal level is empty. Think back to Lewis' (1979) thought experiment and "[c]onsider the case of [...] two gods. They inhabit a certain possible world, and

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[12] Lewis' modal realism (2001) roughly states that all possible worlds are real in the same way as the actual world.

[13] List argues that "[...] just as Lewis considered his own modal realism about uncentered worlds theoretically useful in the philosophy of modality, a proponent of the many-worlds theory of consciousness may consider an analogous modal realism about first-personally centred worlds theoretically useful in the philosophy of consciousness." (p. 17)

[14] To clarify this, List states: "Let Ω_{3rd} denote the set of all possible third-personal worlds, and let W1st denote the set of all possible first-personally centred worlds. (Depending on the intended interpretation, "possible" could mean either "metaphysically possible" or "nomologically possible".) Now consider the mapping that maps each first-personally centred world (ω,π) to the corresponding third-personal world ω. This clearly has the properties of a supervenience mapping as just defined […]. This should be unsurprising, since first-personally centred worlds include strictly more facts than third-personal worlds." (p. 23)

they know exactly which world it is. Therefore they know every proposition that is true at their world [and] are omniscient. Still [...] neither one knows which of the two he is." (p. 520) Similarly, List (2023) argues:

> "[...] some facts, such as how I fit into the world or what I experience, are left open by a third-personal world. Even if I knew the totality of third-personal facts that hold at the world as depicted by the one-world picture, but lacked any first-personal information, my third-personal knowledge by itself would not allow me to infer my own first-person perspective on the world. The first-personal facts are under-determined by the third-personal ones [...]." (p. 12)

Thus, under this interpretation, if one is to place a subject in the world, then one needs to specify something beyond the third-personal world, namely, a first-person perspective on it, safeguarding the distribution of facts from being pushed into an arbitrary direction. As a result, while he adopts first-person realism and non-solipsism on the one hand, List rejects one-world and, some would argue, non-fragmentation on the other. Just as his colleagues do, he takes first-person, subjective facts to be, at least in part, constitutive of conscious experience.

Framing the Views

We have covered a lot of ground, so let me take stock of where we are. I initially focused on List's framework due to its structured approach, and because it offers a set of possible responses to the challenge of reconciling the subjective, first-person nature of conscious experience with a broader metaphysical framework; a list of *desiderata* for theories of consciousness, if you will. And while none of the authors I engaged with explicitly mention the quadrilemma, the notions of first-person realism and of subjective facts about consciousness are evidently central to all the aforementioned pieces of work—as they all seem to embrace them.

The quadrilemma is, in this way, not a normative framework, but one that gets us closer to answering my initial research question—namely, how are we to understand the metaphysical structure of the subjective character of experience?

> "The quadrilemma can be used to derive formally valid arguments in support of each of the competing routes. This is because, from any triple of the four claims, one can infer the negation of the fourth. For instance, [...] fragmentalists of the kind described by Kit Fine can use first-person realism, non-solipsism, and one world as premises. All four arguments are formally valid, in the sense that their premises entail their conclusions, but which argument, if any, we consider sound depends on where we stand in the debate on which of the four claims to uphold and which to give up." (p. 17)

I started the exposition of the views by mentioning that according to the quadrilemma, for our intended metaphysical picture to make sense—and given that we are embracing first-person realism—we needed to drop either 'non-solipsism', 'non-fragmentation', or 'one world'. As you can see, positions vary greatly. In what follows, I attempt to argue that accepting either fragmentalism or many-worlds—and therefore dropping 'non-fragmentation' or 'one-world'—are both tenable and defensible positions. The other options, however, entail leaning into a form of solipsism that I struggle to defend.

Part 3: Critical Evaluation

I now want to more explicitly sketch the potential solutions to the quadrilemma that, through reading the various authors' positions, I have found to be more convincing. My aim in exploring this framework was to show that for the first-person realist, the crux of the matter lies in understanding whether reality is oriented towards one point of view (leaning into solipsism), or rather, on a par, equally distributed across subjects (requiring fragmentation or many-worlds).

That is, once we set aside the debate over the existence of subjective facts—which following Nagel's insights, I addressed in Part 1—the discussion shifts to how these first-person realities can be integrated into a coherent metaphysical framework, even when incompatible facts (P for me, while ¬P for you) obtain. It is precisely this point of contention, which I identified through the quadrilemma, that I now want to investigate further.

In what follows, I engage with the intuitive resistance I had towards both Hare's and Merlo's arguments, briefly explore why I recognize solipsistic tendencies in their work, and subsequently elaborate on why this might not be the best way out of the quadrilemma. Afterwards, I discuss why I think List's, (and in particular) Lipman's, and Fine's positions seem more plausible. That is, I argue that embracing fragmentalism and/or many-worlds is the most tenable position. Lastly, I provide an account of how the first-person realist can think about a complete metaphysical picture of the subjective character of experience.

Why would we avoid solipsism?

If solipsism is true—that is, if only one's own mind is certain to exist—then a problem arises as to how to account for the apparent coherence and regularity of the nature of experience. In other words, if the external world and other minds are mere projections of my own, it seems like it would be impossible to explain why they exhibit such consistency and complexity, which far exceed the capabilities of any single individual (let alone myself). It is, moreover, far too big of a topic to be tackled in only a few pages.

I am reminded, however, of Wittgenstein's argument for the impossibility of a private language (1953), and his ideas regarding certainty (1969). To echo his train of thought, language is public in nature, and meaningful concepts arise within shared practices through the language games *we* play, meaning that the existence of other minds—and the understanding, critiquing, accepting, rejecting, or misinterpreting of other people's ideas—is a 'basic certainty' that must be presupposed.[15] Moreover, and relevant to our current discussion, many of the subjective facts that obtain, do so because of our interpretation of the intentionality we attribute to the people around us. Hence, solipsism directly contradicts this deeply ingrained sense of a 'shared' reality, in which I routinely empathize with others, interpret their expressions and behaviors as indicative of conscious experience, and rely on collective efforts to build knowledge and navigate the world—as I am doing by writing this thesis.

In other words, these interactions suggest that our first-person experience—and its corresponding subjective facts—is not isolated, but embedded within a network of prior causes and conditions, including

[15] To briefly explain, 'basic certainties' were introduced by Wittgenstein in 'On Certainty' (1969) as a response to Moorean propositions such as, 'here is a hand'. They are neither true nor false; doubt and error do not play a role in them. They, moreover, never come in isolation but are always part of a system or 'nest'; they form a coherent picture, and perhaps most importantly to us here, they show themselves in the way we act.

intersubjective relations.[16] Or better put, that the totality of facts is not oriented towards one point of view, but rather, equally distributed amongst individuals: the subjective facts that obtain for you are just as real as those that obtain for me, with no hierarchy, nor presence, nor specialness found *only* in me—that is, we might be special, but (unfortunately for some) not uniquely so.

While I do not claim that Hare and Merlo's views necessarily lead to, or explicitly endorse solipsism, I do find solipsistic tendencies present in their work, especially relating to said supposed uniqueness of the subjective factivity they seem to embrace. That is, Merlo seems to restrict factivity to what obtains relative to his subjective specialness, while Hare restricts it to what obtains relative to his presence. And importantly, "[i]f one restricts factivity to what obtains relative to oneself, one obtains a solipsist-like or 'metaphysically centered' picture according to which the world is in accord with that it is like from your own standpoint only." (Lipman 2023b, p. 550)

Hare's theory, on the one hand, places a strong metaphysical emphasis on the self's present experiences, treating them as uniquely real, while relegating the experiences of others to a hypothetical or secondary status. "For an egocentric presentist, the situations are not symmetrical. It's not that my pain is present to me and his present to him. Mine is present and his is absent" (p. 372). This singular focus creates a tension with the notion of equally real, independent presences, and the mutual influence and interdependence of subjective facts. In this way, while EP resolves some metaphysical issues, it does so seemingly by narrowing the ontological scope of what is real, making it difficult to reconcile with my intuitive view of how reality is shaped.

His view is, however, not completely mistaken in my opinion, but perhaps in need of an update. Namely, it would benefit from the acceptance of the reality and presence that others also experience:

> "A salient criticism of [his] "egocentric presentism" which […] is a precursor of the many-worlds theory but lacks this modal realist commitment, is precisely its solipsistic flavour. Hare writes: "an egocentric presentist believes that only one subject world exists. There are no other subject worlds." [(Hare 2009, p. 41)] By taking the view that other subjects' first-personally centred worlds are real, albeit not present for me, the many-worlds picture can avoid this. It can, on the one hand, point to what is special about my own conscious experience (its presence for me) but, on the other hand, retain a modal realist commitment to the existence of other subjects' conscious experiences too [...]" (List 2023, pp. 16-17).

On the other hand, in Merlo's case, if by 'subjectivism' he means that 'everything is subjective', then Nagel would say that it "must be nonsense, for it would itself have to be either subjective or objective. But it can't be objective, since in that case it would be false if true. And it can't be subjective, because then it would not rule out any objective claim, including the claim that it is objectively false." (1997, p. 15)

We hence need to ask: is Merlo advancing a specific subjectivist thesis about conscious experience, or about the complete nature of reality itself? Is he claiming that there *are* subjective facts, or that *all* facts are subjective? The former I agree with, while the latter implies the sort of subjectivism that "[…] does not call for a reply, since it is just a report of what the subjectivist finds it agreeable to say." (Nagel 1997, p. 15). *Prima facie*, it is not totally clear to me what Merlo is trying to say:

[16] The biological determinism that nervous systems seem to follow is partly responsible for this, but as I mentioned before, these are problems for cognitive scientists to dive into.

> "The kind of inegalitarianism implied by SVM is not 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 gets to be privileged is, itself, a subjective matter" (Merlo 2016, p. 324)

If he implicitly means that the entirety of reality is oriented towards a specific subject, then he seems to be arguing for subjectivism *only* about the mental while at the same time reaping the benefits of what looks like a broader, more controversial position. And at first sight, this seems like a case of having your cake and eating it, almost resembling the global relativist position—which is also vulnerable to the accusation of inconsistency and self-refutation: if everything is relative then relativism itself must also be relative.

Thus, on this reading, although Merlo successfully avoids self-refutation and some of the initial accusations I charged him with, it remains difficult to accept the leap he seems to make from his perceived, subjective specialness—or the 'subjectivist view of the *mental'*, as he himself calls it—to this bolder, 'global', subjectivist view of the *nature of reality* (about the metaphysical structure of all conscious experience).

However, on a different reading, one could interpret Merlo as trying to make a far more defensible and less controversial claim, namely, that "some propositions are true simpliciter without being true from all points of view" (p. 318). Under this interpretation—which might be more charitable than it should—the totality of the *subjective* facts that obtain for me are indeed oriented towards a point of view, namely, mine. If reality (or 'the world' in Wittgenstein's terms) is the totality of facts, then someone's reality is the totality of *their* subjective facts—namely, everything that is the case for that subject. Yet, the way the totality of all facts—both objective and subjective—is oriented is *itself* not a subjective matter.

Therefore, the fact describing the state of affairs that leads me to judge that I am special, is the same sort of fact describing the state of affairs that leads me to judge that I am not. They merely obtain as special *because* they are mine—because my mental states happen to obtain exclusively for *me*—and not because I am unique in any metaphysical sense. And while it is no more real or fundamental than any other subjective fact obtaining, it is the self-referential nature and structure of conscious experience that makes a mental state feel uniquely mine and, consequently, special or present.

Hence, my concern lies, not with his subjectivism, nor with the obtainment of specialness as a subjective fact, but with the problematic choice of the term which erroneously implies a unique, hierarchical or inegalitarian nature—suggesting that one person could be 'more special' than another—that I intuitively disagree with. "After all, according to Hare (2009), only my pains and pleasures are present, and according to Merlo (2016), I am the only one who experiences PAIN and PLEASURE." (Builes 2024, p. 13) And to me, this does not look like a complete metaphysical picture of conscious experience.

This is because subjective facts do not replace all facts, but rather, because they are a further category of fact. Objective facts, nevertheless, remain a crucial and necessary objective 'boundary', if one is to be epistemically responsible. That is, similar to the way the human brain continuously tries to match its predictions with what it perceives, our consciousness also tries to match (or make sense of) the subjective facts that obtain for us with the objective facts that constraint them.[17] If a rich and full mental life—like the

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[17] This brings to mind a well-known quote from Marx—which I am well aware originates in a completely different context, yet still resonates with my line of thought here: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." (Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, 1859, p. 3) Marx was, of course, making a socio-historical claim, and not engaging in analytic

one conscious humans enjoy—cannot exist without the use of a public language, then that public language must itself, in part, constraint or determine said mental life.

Given all of this, one may wonder why anyone would want to lean into solipsism in the first place. As it turns out, for the first-person realist, the theoretical appeal is great indeed: embracing it would get rid of important issues we have been dealing with, such as incompatible facts obtaining for different subjects. However, it would do so at the cost of removing other subjects from the picture, and hence, the disagreements all together. Disagreements that would not be possible were there a Wittgensteinian private language rather than a public one. And as I previously said, this seems to be proof enough, at least for me, of there being other minds besides my own.

Thus, while Hare and Merlo both relax the 'non-solipsism' leg of the quadrilemma (perhaps with the aim of avoiding a fragmented reality or a ‘many-worlds’ interpretation), List's many-worlds theory and Fine's fragmentalism still look like more plausible solutions to the quadrilemma—even if that means re-assessing what the coherence of reality looks like. Indeed, undermining the sense in which I am special vis-a-vis other people is exactly what my intuitions tell me a complete theory of consciousness should do. As I mentioned in Part 2, Fine argues:

> “Suppose one were a first-personal realist, one thought that reality was constituted by first-personal facts, such as the fact that I am in pain. Then it would appear to be quite absurd to suppose that a particular person, myself, was privileged and that reality was somehow oriented towards the first-personal facts that held for me, though not for you.” (Fine 2015, p. 401)

Why would we embrace fragmentalism or many-worlds?

Given subjective facts, if solipsism is false (and we do indeed inhabit a reality filled with a multitude of different subjects), then one should be a many-worlds realist, or a fragmentalist—both of which challenge the traditional assumption of a unified, coherent reality. Regardless, one’s preference will hinge on the intuitive understanding of how the first-person realist takes reality to be, that is, (1) fragmented, or (2) encompassing a multitude of real, first-personal worlds.

For starters, Fine's framework is primarily concerned with the metaphysics of tense and temporal passage. And while he does address first-person realism in passing, his specific argument is in favor of a semi-realist account of tensed facts. He agrees, moreover, with my reluctance to conform to solipsism, and proposes several arguments that, “if correct, show that the nonstandard position constitutes the only viable form of realism, that if one is going to be a realist about tense then one should adopt the nonstandard rather than the standard position.” (p. 404)

In this way, if one is going to be a realist about first-person, subjective facts, then option (1) is to adopt the non-standard rather than the standard realist position. That is, one should adopt a position that recognizes reality to also be first-personal, but sees all subjects or standpoints as on a par. And if one is going to be a non-standard realist in this way, then one should be a fragmentalist (Fine, 2006).

For the fragmentalist, reality is fragmented, in the sense that it is composed of differing coherent fragments; contradictions within coherent fragments of reality will be avoided, even though one coherent

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philosophy of mind. However, the core idea—that our conscious experience is not independent but also shaped by external conditions—echoes my thoughts about the relationship between subjective and objective facts.

fragment may not be compatible with another. If different subjective facts correspond to different fragments, then they are internally coherent but possibly incompatible with others (Fine, 2006). And importantly, as I said before, just as tensed facts are not uniquely oriented toward one moment in time but are indifferently distributed across time—which granted, is very controversial—first-person facts should likewise be understood as indifferently distributed across individuals.

This, indeed, seems to me to reflect the natural indifference that reality has towards any subject in particular. Under this interpretation, even if we were to adopt an objective, third-personal stance that was somehow detached from any first-personal experience—that is, without adopting any subject's standpoint—we would still be able to conceive of conscious reality (or consciousness in general) as being (at least partly) constituted by subjective facts.

Importantly, moreover, the assumption that accepting the existence of incompatible subjective facts leads to an incoherent conception of reality stems from a misunderstanding of how such facts interact (Lipman 2015). More specifically, this concern arises from a presumption that the fragmentalist actually denies, namely, that the reality of one subjective fact must preclude the reality of incompatible subjective facts. In other words, it assumes that all subjective facts necessarily co-obtain.

In a fragmented metaphysical framework, however, this assumption no longer holds: different subjective facts—rooted in distinct standpoints or first-person perspectives—do not necessarily co-obtain. For the fragmentalist, subjective facts can exist within a fragmented world without being forced into mutual exclusivity.

> "[…] we can see that the fragmentalist framework should no longer be described as offering an 'incoherent' picture of reality or resisting that all 'contradictions' can be ironed out—contrary to Fine's gloss on the view. All contradictions should be ironed but, when we do so, we may still be left with the statements of incompatible facts that do not co-obtain and so stay out of each other's hairs." (Lipman 2015, p. 3132).

If one is not convinced, however, List's ideas offer a different, albeit clever solution to the quadrilemma. In his 'many-worlds' framework—which, as I mentioned before, embraces a unique version of Lewis' (2001) modal realism—subjective facts are embedded within first-personally centered worlds, represented as ordered pairs (ω,π), where ω is the shared third-personal world, and π is the locus of subjectivity defining a specific perspective. This again addresses some of our worries, including the coherence one:

> "Unless we wish to accept a strong form of solipsism, we may reasonably assume that the same third-personal world can be paired with different loci of subjectivity which correspond to different conscious subjects. [...] The third-personal facts instantiated at each of our first-personally centred worlds coincide. But the first-personal facts differ." (List 2023, pp. 15 - 16)

In this way, if one is going to be a realist regarding first-person facts, option (2) is to become a many-worlds realist. That is, one should adopt a position that recognizes reality as encompassing not only a shared third-personal world but also a plurality of first-personally centered worlds, each corresponding to a distinct locus of subjectivity; to a distinct standpoint. Similar to my previous point, just as modal facts are not uniquely oriented toward one possible world but are indifferently distributed across worlds, first-person facts should likewise be understood as indifferently distributed across individuals: across different loci of subjectivity.

Now, while his model is conceptually appealing, some might challenge List's view on how it avoids collapsing into fragmentalism[18], as it leaves a key question unresolved: when an experience exists for one subject but not for another, what does this reveal about the nature of the experience itself? One might suggest that the experience exists in one world but not the other, but this seems to merely restate the obvious, namely, that one person has the experience, and that the other does not.

For List, the central question concerns the subjective fact of there *being* experience in the first place. So, to address this, he could consider two potential routes: either acknowledge that the experience both exists and does not exist across different worlds—which indeed would lead him into a form of fragmentalism—or privilege one world as the 'true' or only locus of the experience, thus leaning into a form of solipsism. My preference goes to the former, also because both frameworks can, in some sense, benefit from each other's concepts.

If we look at it through the concept of co-obtainment, for instance, List's many-worlds framework ensures that subjective facts co-obtain only within their respective centered worlds, avoiding contradictions between the experiences of different subjects. For instance, in (ω,π), the fact 'I feel pain' might co-obtain with other subjective facts specific to π, while in another world (ω,π'), the fact 'I feel no pain' could co-obtain with π's perspective. These facts are incompatible but do not directly conflict because they are confined to distinct loci of subjectivity (π and π'). 'He lives in his own world', is an appropriate and true statement under this interpretation, which I find appealing not least due to its common-sense interpretation.

Contradictions can, in this manner, be resolved through the principle that third-personal facts remain invariant across all centered worlds. The shared third-personal world ω provides a stable backdrop upon which subjective variations are layered.[19] And as List argues, this 'stratification' ensures that while subjective facts differ across worlds, they do not undermine the coherence of reality. The co-obtainment of subjective facts within each world reflects the local coherence of individual experiences, while the global framework remains intact due to the independence of centered worlds.

Therefore, whether one is a fragmentalist (1), or a many-worlds realist (2), even if we were to adopt an objective, third-personal stance that was somehow detached from any first-personal experience—that is, without adopting any subject's standpoint—we would still be able to conceive of conscious reality (or consciousness in general) as being (at least partly) constituted by subjective facts.

A Common Objection

As you may have noticed, my argument proceeds (through Nagel's original formulation of the problem) from the adoption of first-person realism[20]—which some, including Hare (2009), would call "the most

[18] I am drawing here from Lipman's preliminary comments on my thesis.

[19] This brings to mind Iris Einheuser's (2006) response to the general refutation argument that certain philosophers, like Paul Boghossian (2006), employ against conventionalists like, for instance, fact constructivists. Einheuser also introduces a modal framework—albeit different to List's—with ordered pairs (*s,c*) of what she calls *substrata* and *carvings*. She states: "The substratum can be construed as "the world as commonly conceived minus the features that are regarded as conventionally determined [(the carvings or c-features)]. Depending on the conventionalism in question, the substratum might be phenomenal space and the c-features the physical objects; or the substratum might be the totality of physical particles distributed over space-time and the c-features the macro-objects; or the substratum might be actions with their physical and intentional properties and the c-features their moral properties." (p. 461)

[20] For more specific arguments in favour of first-person realism, see Builes' (2024) paper, in which he argues that the view "[...] can be motivated by a wide variety of central considerations throughout philosophy, concerning consciousness, time, (anti-)haecceitism, ethics, personal identity, and modality." (p. 15)

obvious thing in the world" (p. 98)—to the conclusion of what this entails for our metaphysical picture.[21] My preferred solutions to the quadrilemma enable a deeper investigation into *both* the nature of qualitative subjective experience and the distinctive, perspectival character that defines it.

However, as intuitive as the notion of subjective facts is to me, I am not blind to the idea that this is not the case for many. There are common objections, or better put, alternatives to first-person realism, which also try to explain subjective experience without accepting subjective facts. You may have seen hints of this idea throughout my thesis, but suffice it to say, analyzing all the other metaphysical frameworks that try to explain the 'hard problem' falls beyond the scope of this work. One notable mention, however, is the notion of subjective experience being a result of appearances derived from objective facts, rather than them being subjective facts themselves. So, let me briefly investigate this notion.

Imagine two identical twins, X and Y, born and raised in identical environments. They share the same genetic makeup, upbringing, education, and hobbies; their lives, hypothetically, mirror each other in every objectively measurable way. That is, there would be no third-person way to distinguish one from the other. Their individual identities hinge entirely on the first-person perspective—on their respective subjective experience of being themselves: only X and Y would know who they are through their own experience and the unique, perspectival, and internal point of view.

Imagine now that they both encounter an apple on the ground when walking together, at the same time and place. Third-personally, they both should be feeling the same, that is, they are experiencing the same external object and the same objective fact; we can third-personally assess what the state of affairs is. Still, for X, the apple's redness feels distinctly warm, 'cozy', and inviting, evoking a particular sense of nostalgia that obtains exclusively for her. For Y, however, the same apple's redness seems cooler, more mechanical, and almost depressing, carrying with it a different sense of nostalgia that only obtains for her. The subjective facts that obtain in their experiences are distinct: they reflect the different mental states of affairs, and their perspectival nature.

The critic might argue that these are simply appearances derived from the objective, third-personal facts—such as the apple's surface reflecting light at specific wavelengths, or their neural architectures processing these stimuli differently. It is a fact, they might say, that the apple elicits those memories and feelings. Yet that is what they are: memories and feelings—subjective mumbo-jumbo—not subjective facts. As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, however, this reductive attempt fails to explain the metaphysical 'strength' of what it means for X and Y to perceive the apple: for the first-person realist, subjective facts are how reality manifests itself to—or is carved out for—each subject.[22]

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[21] This is similar, albeit not exactly, to Lipman's (2023b) argumentation about his reframed argument proceeding from the metaphysical assumption of what it means to be a subject in a certain mental state, to an epistemological constraint on objective accounts.

[22] Nevertheless, addressing how these differing facts are neurologically possible in the first place is of outmost importance. This, as I mentioned, has been (and is being) investigated by cognitive scientists, and indeed, I do not think that we can build a complete picture of conscious experience without an appeal to what is happening in the brain of the individuals for whom different subjective facts obtain. I am not trying to claim that subjective facts are reducible to these brain processes, but rather, that the different neural architectures found across subjects allow for different and incompatible facts to obtain. In other words, these subjective facts influence and determine—and in turn are influenced and determined by—our cognitive apparatus; they have a direct impact in how we construct situation models of the world, and in turn, how our situation models directly impact further subjective facts. No neuronal action occurs in isolation—it is shaped by past experiences, genetic predispositions, hormonal influences, and even cultural histories. These variations, small as they may be, culminate in profoundly different subjective experiences, accompanied and constituted by their respective subjective facts.

Another critic might similarly want to claim that what we call subjective facts are nothing more than indexical facts. For instance, the claim 'I am experiencing the apple as pleasant' might be framed as an indexical expression describing an appearance of the objective fact that someone is experiencing the apple as pleasant. Thus, the critic might argue that these indexical facts are actually appearances derived from objective facts and do not necessitate the 'absurd' metaphysical category of subjective facts—as this would seem to add unnecessary metaphysical complexity.

But once again, the critic misses the mark here, for she is arguing against the need for subjective facts given their supposed possible reducibility to indexical facts. Subjective experience, and hence, subjective facts, however, are not reducible to, nor do they merely describe linguistic perspectives. Rather, they reflect *truths* about states of affairs; about how reality obtains uniquely for a specific subject. And while objective facts directly influence and constraint the way in which subjective facts obtain, they do not exhaust the full content of subjective experience.

In this way, and as Nagel argued, the subjective character of experience resists reduction to third-personal descriptions, even if mediated by neural or physical processes, or by indexical propositions. The epistemic gap between subjective and objective knowledge hence mirrors the epistemic gap between indexical and non-indexical knowledge, such as knowing that 'I am here', versus knowing *who* is here. If we accept that the former motivates the existence of subjective facts, we should similarly accept that the latter motivates recognizing these as metaphysically significant.

The Problems of Consciousness

So far, I have stated my preference for two plausible solutions to List's quadrilemma, and have argued for this on theoretical grounds, as it seems to be a plausible solution to our problem. But I want to take a step back, and quickly situate our discussion before I close it: the subjective character of consciousness presents two distinct, yet deeply interconnected, mysteries, each demanding attention in its own right.

The first involves the subjective qualitative aspects of experience—how we account for the 'redness of red' or the feeling of *malegría,* for instance. The second deals with the *perspectival* nature of consciousness, which is concerned with how these are experienced from a particular point of view—which mirrors other discussions regarding perspectival metaphysics (such as temporal facts obtaining relative to a specific time, or modal facts obtaining relative to our actual world).

These two issues are, in my opinion, the main pieces of the puzzle that the metaphysical structure of the subjective character of experience presents. Importantly, both are captured by the notion of subjective facts, and they jointly describe the 'what-it's-likeness' of experience. Accordingly, my main focus has been on addressing how we can understand and accept such facts—without descending into incoherence or contradiction—and on integrating them into a broader metaphysical framework of reality. Yet, while I have explored the quadrilemma and outlined preliminary solutions, further investigation is needed if we are to integrate these insights into a comprehensive theory of mind.

For the purposes of this thesis, for instance, I focused solely on human consciousness, setting aside positions like panpsychism. However, subjective facts and first-person realism are relevant to a wide range of influential theories of consciousness—be it integrative, higher-order, representational, narrative, cognitive, or neural. If there is something it is like to be something, then there must be facts that only obtain

from that standpoint or perspective.[23] And although the criteria for what can play such a role remain open to debate, my aim has been to demonstrate that incorporating standpoint-dependent facts is crucial for constructing a robust metaphysical framework that captures both objective and standpoint-dependent phenomena—the standpoint being a subject, in our case.

Concluding Remarks

My aim with this thesis has been to elucidate the irreducibly subjective nature of conscious experience and its implications for a complete metaphysical picture. For starters, 'what it is like' to be a conscious being, as Nagel argued, cannot be fully captured by objective, third-person descriptions. This suggests that consciousness may contain irreducible first-personal, subjective facts, which I tried to motivate in Part 1. Engaging with the relevant literature has shown that, if one accepts first-person, subjective facts, then one should become a first-person realist.

Through the quadrilemma I explored in Part 2, I argued that one should become a fragmentalist or a many-worlds realist if one, being a first-person realist, wants to avoid solipsism. After, I showed that subjective facts grounded in the standpoint of a conscious subject challenge traditional metaphysical assumptions and commitments to, for instance, coherence and unity. However, by recognizing that subjective facts obtain relative to loci of subjectivity (List, 2023) or that they co-obtain within a fragment (Lipman, 2015), I argued we can accommodate the multiplicity of first-personal perspectives within a coherent metaphysical structure, while at the same time avoiding falling into the belief that only our mind is certain to exist.

This means that if one accepts first-person realism, then one must also accept the fragmented or modal (in the usual 'possibility' sense) nature of reality that follows. This, moreover, need not be a defect of the theory, but a reflection of the irreducible complexity of a world inhabited by diverse, conscious subjects. If the world is the totality of facts, then to ignore the subjective ones that arise from our first-person perspective is to overlook a fundamental aspect of this totality.

By embracing the irreducibility of subjective facts, we echo the phenomenological quest to understand how (and if) subjectivity can know objectivity. I hope the reader can appreciate my attempt at building a picture that respects the subjective character of consciousness, while at the same time situating it within a broader metaphysical framework. In doing so, you may find that, while *malegría* and other subjective facts might be out of reach to you, they still are real for those who experience them.

[23] And this, moreover, is not only of philosophical interest: the difference between subjective accounts and objective diagnosis is of crucial importance in many other fields. Take medicine, for instance. The subjective feeling of a throbbing headache would ultimately not be assessed were it not for the subjective facts that obtain for the patient, inducing him to complain to a medical doctor. And this subjectivity is emphatically crucial: successful diagnosis of a ruptured brain aneurysm, which produces what physicians call the 'worst headache of your life', relies on the subject's insight into how pain feels for herself, and how similar it is to previously experienced feelings of pain. Subjective facts obtaining for the first time demand our attention, as our subjective state of affairs now contains new data. The 'worst pain of my life' is unequivocally different to the worst pain of your life; I will never be able to feel exactly what it feels like to give birth, for instance. But I can compare it to the second worst pain of my life, or to the mild pain I had just a week ago.

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