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Self-reflection as dialectic:

How we can follow the Delphian calling to self-knowledge whilst avoiding Narcissus' fate

Durham University, MA in Philosophy
MA Dissertation

Abstract

Self-reflection refers to our ability to think about ourselves and our lives and to ask and answer questions ranging from “Who am I?” to “Why did I do this?”. It is thus considered a valuable means to gain self-knowledge. Structurally, reflection involves two elements, a reflecting and a reflected-on, in other words a subject and an object. In the case of self-reflection, subject and object are the same, the reflecting is the reflected-on. As subject and object are traditionally conceived of as radically opposed i.e. mutually exclusive, this situation has led to considering self-reflection problematic: If self-reflection is always reflection on an object, it is thought that self-reflection cannot yield insight into oneself qua subject and might even represent a danger to one's subjectivity which is characteristic of lived life. Refuting the mutual exclusiveness of subject and object, self-reflection can be regained as a valuable means to gain self-knowledge. It is thereby going to be demonstrated that self-reflection has a dialectical structure. The nature of the self-knowledge yielded by self-reflection conceived of as dialectic is going to be explored. A final part shows how a dialectical account of self-reflection proves useful in clarifying the role which self-reflection plays in schizophrenia.

I declare that this essay is 14410 words long
Anke Maatz

Supervisor: Dr B. Smith
References in Harvard Style

16th September 2011

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Introduction

Self-reflection refers to our ability to think about ourselves and our lives and to ask and answer questions ranging from “Who am I?” to “Why did I do this?”, “Why did I say this?” or “Why do I feel like this?”. It is thus a cognitive process which, so it is believed, makes something that was formerly implicit, e.g. the considerations and motivations for an action or a judgement, explicit and thereby delivers what has been termed self-knowledge, self-understanding or self-comprehension. Engaging in self-reflection then is our way to follow the Delphian calling “Know thyself”, metaphorically speaking to set out to find ourselves. The importance of this mental activity is widely recognised. Socrates expresses it saying that “life without examination is not worth a man’s living” (Plato 1997, sec.38a) and that it is through examination of one’s life that one becomes happy (ibid., 36e). In this vein, the ability to self-reflect has been described as what makes psychic activity specifically human and as such to be indispensable for mental health (Jaspers 1997, p.347).

Structurally, self-reflection always involves two elements, a reflecting and a reflected-on; in other words, a subject and an object. The separation of subject and object as it takes place in self-reflection is seen to bring about a new awareness which is object-like or explicit. But this very separating and explicating process holds a risk, as aptly expressed in the myth of Narcissus. Sitting by a lake, Narcissus looks into the water and sees himself reflected on the surface. He falls in love with his reflected image and wishes to get closer to it, feel it and hold it. Narcissus bends over, touches the surface of the water only to realise that the image eludes his grasp. Becoming aware that he will never be able to reach the reflected image of himself, he despairs and commits suicide (Ovid 1986, bk.III, verses 343-513). Instead of finding himself, he has lost himself. Seeing the living Narcissus as the implicit subject, and his reflected image which brings himself in front of his own eyes in an object-like manner, as the explicit, and conceiving of self-reflection as aiming at grasping the implicit explicitly, the situation lends itself to the following interpretations: Narcissus’ realisation that there is a fundamental difference between the implicit and the explicit making it impossible for the implicit to get hold of its own explicit, means that self-reflection is impossible. Sartre, in this vein, calls self-reflection a “failure” (2003, p.177). Given this impossibility, it is thought that self-reflection cannot be an adequate means to gain insight into oneself and one’s life. The situation has also been interpreted as demonstrating a danger inherent in all aspiration to explication as the latter seems to jeopardise the implicit i.e. lived life. Such a position is most

prominently taken up by Dreyfus (2005). In the light of Narcissus' fate, which was predicted by the seer Tiresias's prophesy that Narcissus should only live long if he did never come to know himself (*ibid.*), is the Delphian calling to self-knowledge to be ignored? How can the picture of self-reflection as impossible or dangerous be reconciled with the intuition that self-reflection plays a central role in a human being's life and affords self-knowledge?

The project of this dissertation is to give credit to the Delphian calling and to establish self-reflection as an adequate means to pursue it whilst accommodating the risk expressed by the myth of Narcissus. To meet the apparent contradiction and the challenge it poses to self-reflection as an important feature of human life, the form of separation taking place in self-reflection has to be examined. This will include an analysis of our understanding of the notion of explication, which is closely bound up with the notion of objectification. My argument will show that the separation between implicit and explicit is not to be drawn starkly and that explication therefore does not mean relinquishing the implicit. Regarding self-reflection, it will follow that it has a dialectical structure rather than being a linear transition from implicit to explicit and that as such, it is possible and cognitively valuable.

Two terminological clarifications concerning the use and meaning of the word 'reflection' have to be put in place to begin with.

Firstly it has to be noted, that the noun 'reflection' refers to both 'reflective' and 'reflexive' processes. Narcissus reflects himself in the meaning of the word 'to reflect' as in to throw back light. This passive process has to be distinguished from the active, cognitive process to which the adjective 'reflective' refers and where 'to reflect' means to turn back one's thoughts (Anon 1999). It is going to be shown how these two processes are related.

Secondly, a narrow and a broad sense of self-reflection have to be distinguished. In the narrow sense, self-reflection means reflection of the self i.e. it refers to the cognitive process by which one examines one's self. By self, I understand the phenomenal self, the experiential dimension of subjectivity whose reality is widely agreed upon even amongst proponents of a no-self doctrine (Metzinger 2005, p.8). I do not mean to make any claims regarding a metaphysical or empirical self. In the broad sense, self-reflection refers to reflection of everything that is experientially one's own, i.e. to the cognitive process by which one examines one's perceptions, actions, beliefs, attitudes, abilities and so forth. Reflection,

without the qualification of self-, denotes a meta-mental process whose object is not further specified.¹

The first part of this essay will establish preliminaries concerning the relationship of self-reflection and consciousness before addressing two challenges that have been levelled against self-reflection. The first challenge has been brought up against self-reflection in the narrow sense and calls its very possibility into question. Consequently, it claims that self-reflection is not an adequate means to gain self-knowledge. This conception of inadequateness also underlies the second challenge, the latter having been brought up against self-reflection in the broad sense, in particular reflection on one's actions. It claims that self-reflection jeopardises skilled action because the explication taking place in self-reflection is seen to represent a danger to the implicitness of lived life. The answer to both challenges is going to lead to a dialectical account of self-reflection allowing for explication without giving up the implicit. The second part will develop such an account and look into the effects of self-reflection conceived of as dialectic. In particular, it will expand on the nature of self-knowledge. In part III psychopathologies related to self-reflection are going to be discussed in the light of the dialectical account developed earlier. The discussion focuses on the role which self-reflection and its disturbances play in schizophrenia.

Especially part I and II draw on Jaspers' account of self-reflection and understanding as laid down in his *General Psychopathology* in the context of meaningful psychic connections (1997, pt.2, chap. V). However, it is not the intention of this essay to provide a scholarly interpretation of Jaspers' work. Rather, Jaspers' ideas are shown to be useful in answering the challenges which self-reflection faces and in developing an account of self-reflection which accommodates its link with psychopathologies whilst emphasising its non-pathological nature. Thereby, the account intends to come closer to our everyday understanding of self-reflection as a valuable and important part of human life. Due to the paucity of literature on Jaspers' work on self-reflection², it is hoped that this paper might inspire further and more scholarly research in this area.

¹ The question whether all reflection is in fact self-reflection or at least involves an element of self-reflection will not be addressed here.

² Research on google scholar, JSTOR and Project MUSE for 'Jaspers' and 'self-reflection' yielded no relevant results. Private communication with Thomas Fuchs, Karl Jaspers chair for philosophical foundations of psychiatry and psychotherapy in Heidelberg, Germany, with Matthew Ratcliffe, Durham, UK, and Louis A. Sass, Rutgers University, USA, confirmed the absence of well-known work on Jaspers' account of self-reflection.

Part I: Challenges to Self-Reflection

Self-reflection and self-consciousness

Self-reflection is seen to be intimately linked with self-consciousness. The nature of this link however is conceived of in radically opposed ways: Whereas so-called Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness (e.g. Carruthers 2000; Rosenthal 1996; Dennett 1991) hold self-reflection to be a necessary requirement for self-consciousness, in the phenomenological tradition, self-consciousness is held to be a necessary requirement for self-reflection. Self-consciousness on this conception is therefore pre-reflectively co-given in consciousness. Intending to base the account of self-reflection which is going to be advanced in this essay on pre-reflective self-consciousness, this section introduces the latter by contrasting phenomenological with higher-order theories of consciousness.

Higher-order theories hold that phenomenal consciousness, i.e. the experience of what something is like, which appears to be intransitive, can be reduced to transitive consciousness (Rosenthal 1996, p.739). In other words, they hold that for someone to experience a mental state as conscious, this (first-order) mental state has to be taken as the object of another (second-order) mental state. Reflection is seen to provide these additional higher-order mental states and is thereby objectifying. Self-consciousness then depends on self-reflection and can consequently only be understood as consciousness of an objectified self, not as consciousness in itself or simpliciter.

There are a host of objections against higher-order theories of consciousness³. For the purpose of this essay however, I will focus on the problem of the first-person perspective of consciousness. Consciousness being a first-person phenomenon (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, p.14), to be conscious of a mental state means to be aware of the mental state as one's own i.e. to identify oneself as its subject. In Rosenthal's words: "Only if one's thought is about oneself as such, and not about someone that happens to be oneself, will the mental state be a conscious state." (1996, p.750) As Shoemaker (1968, p.561) has pointed out, one can only identify oneself as the subject of a mental state in virtue of knowing something to be true of

³ Criticisms concern the fact that higher-order theories do not allow phenomenal consciousness to animals and infants (Carruthers 2005, p.11; see *ibid.* chap.11 for a refutation of the problematics), that they demand attention where most of the time we seem to have conscious experiences without making any mental effort (Lycan & Ryder 2003) and that they lead into an infinite regress (Sartre 2003, p.8) as given that a second-order mental state is needed to make a mental state conscious, there has to be a third-order mental state to make the second-order mental state conscious and so forth ad infinitum (Ryle argues that the regress is not problematic as any higher-order mental state is "logically [only] condemned to penultimacy", 1994, p.39)

oneself. Holding something to be true of oneself however again requires the identification of oneself and so forth ad infinitum thus leading into a regress. This regress points at an explanatory gap: To avoid leaving conscious experiences in a vacuum devoid of a subject, higher-order theories of consciousness have to accept that there is a fundamental difference between third-person object-identification and first-person self-identification (ibid.) and that the latter consists in a specific first-person perspective. On higher-order theories, this first-person perspective, which can also be called a minimal form of self-consciousness, has to be posited (Zahavi 2005, p.27). However, having to posit self-consciousness as the first-person perspective that all consciousness necessarily involves is not consistent with their claim that all consciousness is transitive. Self-consciousness cannot be provided by self-reflection as self-reflection presupposes self-consciousness (Sartre 2003, p.9) and the attempt to construe consciousness as an extrinsic property bestowed on a mental state by an act of reflection therefore fails. Self-consciousness must be independent of self-reflection, it must be an intrinsic property of consciousness. If self-enabling reflection, it must be pre-reflective.

In the phenomenological tradition, consciousness does not depend on additional mental states, but is seen to be intransitive, “an intrinsic feature of the primary experience” (Zahavi 2005, p.20). Contrary to Rosenthal’s criticism that “[w]e would insist that being conscious is an intrinsic property of mental states only if we were convinced that it lacked articulated structure, and thus defied explanation.” (1993, p.157), it is precisely by analysing the structure of consciousness that phenomenologists can account for the first-person perspective. Firstly, consciousness is intentional: it is always consciousness *of* something. This means that consciousness necessarily has an object and is thereby “oriented towards a being which is not itself.” (Sartre 2003, p.17). Secondly, consciousness is reflexive i.e. turned back on itself and thereby always also self-consciousness (Heidegger 2001, p.135). This self-consciousness is not an additional mental state (Sartre 2003, p.10) but implied in the primary conscious experience; it is immediate, pre-reflective, does therefore not require attention and is non-objectifying (ibid., p.9). Accounting for the first-person perspective of conscious experience, for its implicit quality of mineness (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, p.50), pre-reflective self-consciousness is “subjectivity itself” (Sartre 2003, p.13) and as a “constitutive feature and integral part of phenomenal consciousness” (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, p.50), it is pervasive of all conscious experience. Co-given in this multitude of conscious experiences, pre-reflective self-consciousness is internally differentiated (Zahavi 2005, p.92). Importantly, it is not to be mistaken for explicit, thematic self-consciousness or self-knowledge, but it allows for reflection, explication and thematisation (Sartre 2003, p.9; Zahavi 2005, p.23).

In summary, it was shown that a non-thematic form of self-consciousness must be co-given with any conscious mental state and that self-reflection is therefore not a requirement for self-consciousness. This internally differentiated pre-reflective self-consciousness which emerges through the reflexive structure of consciousness, can then ground self-reflection.

Self-reflection and objectification

Having established subjectivity as pre-reflective and consequently non-objectifying self-consciousness which is pervasive of all conscious experience, it is now possible to address the challenges that have been levelled against self-reflection. These challenges take their starting point from the fact that reflection needs an object and that it is therefore in this sense necessarily objectifying. Seeing subjectivity and objectivity in stark opposition and consequently as mutually exclusive, the proponents of these challenges argue that self-reflection is not an adequate means to gain insight into one's subjectivity because by its objectifying nature, self-reflection distorts subjectivity⁴. It therefore seems impossible to access subjectivity reflectively and the attempt is seen to be dangerous.

Natorp's challenge

The first challenge concerns the narrow sense of self-reflection and questions its very possibility. Seeing that reflection needs an object, this seems to pose a problem in the case of self-reflection since the reflecting and the reflected-on are the same: the object of reflection is the subject. But can the subject be made into an object and even if it can, does objectifying reflection then provide insight into the subject's subjectivity? Natorp thought that this is impossible and expressed his challenge as follows:

If one were oneself to try, if it were at all possible, to somehow grasp the content of immediate experience purely as it is in itself [...] would one then not somehow be forced [...] to artificially still and interrupt the continuous stream of becoming, which surely is how inner life presents itself [...]? But doesn't one then detach it from the experienced, from the subjective, and doesn't one then, nevertheless, make it into an object? In the end, one apparently never grasps the subjective, as such, in itself. On the contrary, in order to grasp it scientifically, one is forced to strip it of its subjective character. (1912, pp.102-103)

⁴ This characterisation of objectification as distortive of lived life is well reflected in the German word for object, 'Gegenstand', literally 'that which stands against' i.e. a hindrance and obstacle.

Reflection, in Natorp's view, tries to grasp something scientifically by which he understands an approach which is detached from the "stream" of "inner life". Such detachment, which is opposed to the immersion and immediacy constitutive of subjectivity, is what Natorp considers to be the objectification necessarily implied in reflection. But the subject cannot be made into an object while retaining its subjective character. Consequently, self-reflection cannot yield any valuable insight into one's subjectivity and is in thus far impossible. Holding that any act of expression, be it through language or behaviour, is objectifying and therefore distortive of subjectivity, it also follows that subjectivity is inexpressible (*ibid.*, p.99).⁵ The myth of Narcissus suggests that not to accept the impossibility of self-reflection has fatal consequences.

It is crucial to note that Natorp's argument relies on the assumption that the opposition of subject and object is radical, that being subject and being object is mutually exclusive. Objectification of the subject is therefore seen to be distortive of subjectivity, a misleading alteration if the aim is to gain insight into one's subjectivity.

Dreyfus' challenge

The second challenge concerns self-reflection in the broad sense, the reflection on what is experientially one's own, in particular one's actions. Paralleling the first challenge which drew a radical distinction between subject and object, this challenge relies on the radical opposition between skilled, absorbed action and self-reflection, a form of rational thinking. Skills, which allow everyday actions to be smooth, quick and performed without mental effort, are implicit, one's awareness of them is non-thematic (Dreyfus 2007, p.104). Self-reflection however makes them explicit i.e. brings them to thematic awareness. As being implicit and being explicit is seen to be mutually exclusive and as implicitness is held to be a necessary feature of skilled action, self-reflection is considered a threat to it. The breakdown of skilled action demonstrates the distortive effects of self-reflection.

⁵ If the claim that subjectivity cannot be expressed in language were true, this would present a serious threat to phenomenology which intends to be a "science of consciousness per se" (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, p.14) and as consciousness is intrinsically first-person i.e. subjective. This is why Heidegger dedicated considerable effort to answer Natorp's challenge (Heidegger 2007). Besides arguing against the subjectivity-disrupting character of reflection, Heidegger also rejects the underlying conception of language as too narrow. The same objection to phenomenology as a reflective science has recently been repeated by Mishara (2007, p.561), an answer to it can be found in Sass et al. (2011).

For an extreme example of the inverse relation of reflection and skilled action, consider the case of Chuck Knoblauch, a former second baseman for the New York Yankees. Knoblauch was so good he was voted best infielder, but one day, rather than simply throwing the ball to first base, it seems he stepped back and started reflecting on how he was throwing the ball—the mechanics of it, as he put it. [...] After that, he couldn't recover his former unreflective absorption and from then on he threw the ball erratically—once into the face of a spectator. (ibid., p.103)

In Chuck Knoblauch's case, thinking about what he was doing, i.e. self-reflection in the broad sense, got in the way of actually doing it and was observably distortive of his formerly skilled action. It made his throws erratic. Although conceding that what he describes is an extreme example, Dreyfus uses this example to illustrate his general claim that skilled action and self-reflection are incompatible. For less extreme examples, we might consider situations in our own lives in which our “[f]ull concentration on a performance hamper[ed] its success” (Jaspers 1997, p.352) or at least made us stop and hesitate for a moment before carrying on with the performance as before. Also, otherwise natural bodily functions can be disturbed by self-reflection (ibid., pp.133-34). Many for example will have experienced not being able to fall asleep while thinking about how urgently they needed to sleep in order to be able to fully concentrate in an exam the next day. But do these examples show that action and reflection are in general incompatible and that thought is the “enemy of expertise” (Dreyfus 2007, p.354)? Dreyfus as well as others who take a similar view on the effects of objectification and explication implied in self-reflection do indeed acknowledge that self-reflection is important during processes of learning new skills (Dreyfus 2007, p.104; Fuchs 2010, p.241). They go on to claim however that self-reflection has to be overcome in order to gain expertise, the mode of action characteristic of our everyday life (Dreyfus 2007, p.104). Referring to William James, they think that “[i]t is a general principle in psychology, that consciousness deserts all processes where it can no longer be of use” (1950, p.496). Consciousness is understood as reflective or thematic consciousness by James. Thus self-reflection, despite its legitimate role in learning, remains incompatible with expert action of which it is distortive due to the radical opposition of immersed action and detached rationality, implicit and explicit.

It could be thought that despite the action-distorting character of self-reflection on this picture, there remains a way to salvage self-reflection in the broad sense as a means to gain self-knowledge: If instead of reflecting on one's ongoing actions one reflected on one's actions in the past, it seems one could gain self-knowledge while avoiding the negative consequences of self-reflection, as one's action which is the object of self-reflection would be completed and could therefore not be distorted anymore.

However, this apparent solution disregards the character of autobiographical memory in which internal and external perspective are “intimately, ineluctably bound up with each other” (Goldie forthcoming, p.30). One does indeed take an external, detached or observer perspective on oneself when one remembers a past action, it is “a familiar but remarkable fact about the psychology of memory [...] that the visual phenomenology of a memory of performing an activity like swimming across a lake will often be presented from a point of view above or behind the figure doing the swimming (that is, *oneself*)” (Moran 1994, p.91). At the same time however one remembers the activity from the inside, from the immersed perspective one had of “the events as they took place” (Goldie forthcoming, p.52). The two perspectives together constitute the complete memory that one has to reflect upon in order to gain self-knowledge. Yet on the picture of reflection drawn by Dreyfus where reflection is constrained to making explicit i.e. to adopt an external, detached perspective, self-reflection cannot take the immersed perspective of autobiographical memory into account.

The move to reflect upon one’s memorised instead of one’s ongoing actions can therefore not salvage self-reflection as a valuable means to gain insight into oneself if, as Dreyfus does, action and thinking are seen to be mutually exclusive.

Both challenges thus arise from the apparent mutual exclusiveness of experiential dimensions or perspectives, a subjective, immersed perspective on the one hand and an objective, detached perspective on the other hand. Viewing self-reflection as adopting the objective, detached perspective whilst emphasising the centrality of the subjective, immersed perspective for what it means to be a subject and for our skilled actions, the apparent mutual exclusiveness of the two perspectives leads to considering self-reflection not apt to provide adequate insight into oneself qua subject. It equally appears not able to provide insight into one’s skilled actions. If one wants to maintain that self-reflection is a valuable means to gain self-knowledge, both challenges have to be refuted. To this purpose, the mutual exclusiveness of the involved perspectives has to be called into question. This will also shed a new light on the notions of objectification and explication.

Meeting the challenges

The structure of Natorp's challenge is well represented in Zahavi's formalisation:

- (1) Experience is a relation between subject (qua experience) and an object (qua experienced).
 - (2) If the subject is to experience itself, it has to take itself as an object.
 - (3) If the subject experiences an object, it does not experience itself.
 - (4) It is impossible to experience true subjectivity.
- (2005, p.74)

The formalisation again brings to light the radical opposition that is seen to obtain between subject and object and the fact that reflection necessarily involves an element of objectification. There is an illuminating imprecision in the formalisation however which takes us into medias res. Where Natorp speaks of 'scientifically grasping' subjectivity, Zahavi speaks of 'experiencing' it. Yet the two terms are by no means synonymous. Establishing pre-reflective self-consciousness precisely showed how subjectivity is experienced implicitly without reflection because human consciousness is in itself reflexive. Natorp's argument, whether he accepts pre-reflective self-consciousness or not does not matter in this respect, only challenges the possibility to reflectively experience subjectivity whence 'experience' should be replaced by 'reflective experience' in Zahavi's formalisation in order to represent Natorp's argument correctly.

- (1) Reflective experience is a relation between subject (qua experience) and an object (qua experienced).
 - (2) If the subject is to reflectively experience itself, it has to take itself as an object.
 - (3) If the subject experiences an object, it does not experience itself.
 - (4) It is impossible to reflectively experience true subjectivity.
- (2005, p.74, my modification)

Accepting that reflection is always reflection of something and in this sense objectifying (premises (1) and (2)), the premise that has to be refuted is premise (3). This can be done by appeal to the pervasiveness of pre-reflective self-consciousness. Interestingly, Natorp's argument can itself be read as a proof of the experience of pre-reflective self-consciousness, since without experience of it, he could not claim that it gets distorted in self-reflection

(Zahavi 2003, p.160). Now with pre-reflective self-consciousness in place and having shown that pre-reflective self-consciousness i.e. subjectivity is implied in all conscious experience, it follows that subjectivity is equally implied in the consciously experienced act of self-reflection. That means that whilst involving objectification, self-reflection is permeated by subjectivity and that the objectification is in this sense not pure or not complete. Rather, the objectification being itself a subjectively experienced act, it contains subjectivity which can therefore not be lost nor distorted by being the object of reflection. Self-reflection is consequently an adequate means to enquire and gain insight into subjectivity.

The reflexive nature of human consciousness which gives rise to a differentiated pre-reflective self-consciousness grounds reflection. This means that reflection is not incompatibly opposed to some kind of original character of subjectivity but consistent with it. The notion of objectification then appears in a new light: Rather than meaning that something is actually experienced as an object, it describes the fact of considering the objective dimension of an experience, of taking a certain perspective on it. Objectification of the subject is therefore compatible with the important insight that “[b]eing oneself is never the same as being an object.” (Jaspers 1997, p.350) In the same way, explication retains the implicitness of an experience; it shows the objective dimension of an experience without thereby relinquishing the implicit dimension i.e. it differentiates dimensions without favouring any particular one.

The fact that subjectivity and implicitness are retained in objectification and explication does not mean however that the reflective process leaves the original experience unchanged. Self-reflection must have effects in order to be cognitively valuable. These effects are not shifts of attention which would merely be different modes of the primary experience (Husserl 1976, pp.75-76), but a new experience. The nature of this new experience is going to be explored in part II.

Before tackling the second challenge, a brief excursus into Sartre’s thoughts about self-reflection. Sartre writes that

The motivation of reflection (reflexion) consists in a double attempt, simultaneously an objectivation and an interiorization. To be to itself as an object-in-itself in the absolute unity of interiorization- that is what the being-of-reflection has to be. [...] - this effort inevitably results in failure; and it is precisely this failure which is reflection. (2003, pp.176-177)

Sartre, although calling it reflection, clearly speaks of self-reflection here as being to itself in a certain way is what is at issue. The attempt to simultaneously objectify and interiorise is the attempt to examine, i.e. to look objectifyingly at, subjectivity. Sartre now holds that this attempt is doomed to failure as in his view objectification and interiorisation are mutually exclusive, i.e. subject and object, as Natorp held as well, radically distinct.

Despite this failure, reflection is possible, but in two distinct forms which Sartre calls pure and impure:

Pure-reflection, the simple presence of the reflective for-itself to the for-itself reflected-on, is at one the original form of reflection and its ideal form; it is that on whose foundation impure reflection appears, it is that [...] which must be won by a sort of catharsis. Impure or accessory reflection [...] includes pure reflection but surpasses it and makes further claims. (ibid., pp. 177-178)

The distinction between pure and impure reflection can be drawn along the lines of objectification, the former being non-objectifying, the latter being objectifying. But if impure reflection “includes pure reflection as its original structure” (ibid., p.182), how can it then become purely objectifying i.e. impure? I think that Sartre, like Natorp, draws the distinction between subject and object, in-itself and for-itself in Sartrean terms, too starkly. They both think that reflection aims at making the subject into an object and see, rightly, that this is impossible. Hence Sartre’s description of reflection as a failure. If however, as shown above, subjectivity is retained in the process of objectification, and Sartre’s conception of impure reflection including pure reflection can be read as expressing this same thought, then impure reflection is not purely objectifying. The distinction of pure and impure reflection therefore becomes superfluous and self-reflection, whilst importantly failing to make the subject into an object, becomes a valuable means to gain insight into one’s subjectivity.

Let us now turn to the second challenge, the objection that self-reflection as a form of rational thinking hampers skilled or expert action. This position, put forward by Dreyfus, has been criticised by McDowell and inspired a debate between them about the relationship of rationality on the one hand and perceptual experience and action on the other hand (Scheer forthcoming). Looking into this debate is helpful to refute the second challenge.

Self-reflection is a cognitive act and as such an expression of rationality. Now Dreyfus, as shown above, holds that rationality and action are mutually exclusive, that “mindedness is the enemy of embodied coping.” (2007b, p. 354). McDowell on the other hand claims that “perceptual experience is permeated with rationality” and “that something parallel should be

said about our agency” (2007b, p.339) i.e. about our intentional actions. If so, the rationalisation of action which happens through self-reflection cannot be said to distort the character of action because it is the character of action itself to be rational.

To establish intentional action to be rational, McDowell has to refute Dreyfus’ conception of rationality. On the latter conception, rationality is seen as necessarily detached and concepts, which rationality develops and applies, consequently as context-independent (Dreyfus 2005, pp.60-61). Actions however take place in and are motivated by a concrete context which is perceived as immediately meaningful. This action-motivating meaning is called affordance (ibid., pp55-56). If now concepts are general i.e. context-independent they cannot take the affordance-character of a situation into account and are therefore inadequate to motivate or guide action. Self-reflection being rational and as such applying concepts, it consequently hampers action if it takes action as its object.

McDowell however has a different picture of rationality in mind:

Dreyfus pictures rationality as detached from particular situations- as able to relate to particular situations only by subsuming them under content determinately expressible in abstraction from any situation. [...] But I think we should reject the picture of rationality as situation-independent. (2007b, p.339)

He argues that our perceptual experience is itself conceptually structured. By this, he does not mean that the content of every perception is conceptual in the sense of being expressible by means of a specific word, but that “any aspect of its content is present in a form in which it is suitable to constitute the content of a conceptual capacity.” (ibid., p.346) This form of perception is specifically human (ibid.) and it holds for all human perception.

Affordances are no longer merely input to a human animal’s natural motivational tendencies: now they are data for her rationality [...]. (ibid., p.344)

Rationality then is not detached anymore: Actions being motivated by affordances and the latter being perceived conceptually i.e. rationally, concepts are realised in action. That means that action is permeated with rationality and self-reflection as an expression of rationality can therefore not be the enemy of action.⁶ The permeation with rationality also means that “we

⁶ Dreyfus objects that even such context-bound concepts are not at play in all action. Namely, he claims that they are absent from what he specifies as absorbed action for “when one is totally absorbed in one’s activity, one ceases to be a subject.” (2007a, p.373). Concepts requiring a subject for their application, they cannot be

can always ask and answer the why question” (Dreyfus 2007, p.102 about McDowell), that is, it permits self-reflection to yield self-knowledge.

On McDowell’s picture however, rationality is not the same as reflection by which he understands a stepping back from one’s experience. Yet “[w]hen one is unreflectively immersed, one is exactly not exercising the ability to step back. But even so the capacities operative in one’s perceiving or acting are conceptual, and their operations are conceptual.” (2007a, p.366) This means that perceiving and acting rationally does not require self-reflection, it is merely the specifically human form of perception that makes it rational (ibid., p.348) without there being any extra mental effort needed. Self-reflection however, McDowell holds, is detached rationality, and he accounts for Chuck Knoblauch’s loss of skill by the fact that he is self-reflecting while maintaining that it is not rationality per se which is hostile to skilled action (2007a, p.367). I agree that self-reflection can become detached and thereby hamper skilled action. Those aspects are going to be examined part III. But it is and does not necessarily so. Following McDowell in taking rationality to be a pre-reflective, pervasive feature of human perception and action, this grounds the rationalisation taking place in self-reflection. Rationalisation is then not opposed to some kind of original character of perception and action, but inextricably related with it. Self-reflection and skilled action are therefore not mutually exclusive.

Now not everything one reflects upon are one’s perceptions or one’s perception-motivated actions. Beliefs, attitudes or desires for example do not fall into either category. McDowell’s conception of perception as permeated with rationality therefore does not relate to self-reflection in the broad sense as such, but only to reflection of one’s perceptions and actions. In so far, it helps to refute the prominent claim that self-reflection and skilled action are mutually exclusive.

The answers to both challenges demonstrate how what had initially been seen as mutually exclusive opposites are in fact related. McDowell’s argument against Dreyfus’ challenge showed this for action and rationality and in this respect parallels the refutation of the first challenge where subject and object, initially seen as such opposites, were shown to be inextricably linked. Self-reflection then does not appear hostile to its objects, subjectivity and action, anymore, as, to use Dilthey’s words: “Thinking [...] is itself a form of life.” (1905, p.326). Thus, self-reflection can be salvaged as a means to gain self-knowledge.

involved in absorbed action. The subject-less experience however is a myth as we have seen earlier that all conscious experience contains pre-reflective self-consciousness i.e. that subjectivity is pervasive.

Part II: Self-Reflection as Dialectic

The dialectical structure of self-reflection

Analysing and answering the challenges levelled against self-reflection, the previous part showed a specific structure that underlies self-reflection: Self-reflection always has to do with a polarity, the poles being different aspects of an experience which are, as the challenges showed, easily thought of as mutually exclusive, contradictory opposites.

In the case of the first challenge, these apparent opposites were the subject and the object. The analysis then showed that, despite being distinct, subject and object are related. Subjectivity being pervasive, it is implied in any object-experience. Also, it is only through object-experience that subjectivity is experienced: Consciousness being intentionally structured, it is always consciousness of something, of an object, and it is in experiencing this object-consciousness as one's own that one pre-reflectively experiences subjectivity. Experiential subject and experiential object are thus mutually dependent, i.e. subjectivity and objectivity at least at the level of thinking about the dimensions of our experience, implied in each other. As Evan says:

[j]ust as our thoughts about ourselves require the intelligibility of this link with the world thought of 'objectively', so our 'objective' thought about the world also requires the intelligibility of this link. (1982, p.212)

In the case of the second challenge, self-reflection deals with the apparent opposition of action and rationality, immersion and conceptuality. Yet McDowell shows that concepts are not situation-independent and thereby retain the immersed character of action. At the same time, concepts are realised in action which is thereby permeated with rationality. Again, what were initially thought of as mutually exclusive opposites are in fact implied in each other.

In both cases, self-reflection has to do with a pair of clearly distinct poles, thought of as opposites, which in their distinctness, are inextricably linked. This means that both poles are equally important (Jaspers 1997, p.357). Such structure of self-reflection is not restricted to the above mentioned polarities of subject and object and of action and rationality, “[i]n *psychology* the polarity of opposites is all-pervasive.” (ibid., p.341)⁷

⁷ In this context, I take psychology to refer only to the attempt to understand oneself through self-reflection. I do not mean to make any claims about a general structure of human experience and certainly not to embrace Jaspers' claim that all Being is polarised (ibid., p.340). However, Plessner's conception of a dialectical anthropology (Heinze 2009) is interesting to consider regarding the question which role polarity plays in human life. His “eccentric positionality”, which he holds to be characteristic of the situation of man, describes the distance human beings naturally have to themselves and the resulting polarity of subjective and objective body

On the conception of self-reflection that underlies Natorp's and Dreyfus' challenges, self-reflection deals with the opposites in a way that does not give consideration to their equal importance. According to their conception, self-reflection relinquishes the subjective, implicit or action pole in favour of an objective, explicit or rationality pole. But if self-reflection, as Dilthey said, "is itself a form of life" and life manifests itself in such polarities, why should self-reflection disregard the nature of these polarities? In what follows, I will present an alternative conception of self-reflection. This conception gives consideration to the equal importance of the involved poles and therefore does not fall prey to the challenges.

The polarity, seen to represent a contradiction, triggers a movement which Jaspers describes as follows:

As [the mind] makes its way from one pole to the other, it cannot tolerate contradiction and endeavours to overcome all contradictions, unify the polarities and contain them within tensions of ever-widening range. The mind grows conscious of the fact that all these opposites belong together and it becomes aware of the manner of their connectedness [...]. (ibid.)

This movement of the mind is self-reflection. But instead of overcoming one pole and reaching the other in form of a linear transition, it unifies the poles. This means that the poles are shown in their connectedness, a connectedness in separation, maintaining their distinctness. According to Jaspers, such a movement "is termed a *dialectic*." (ibid.) and self-reflection being this movement can therefore be said to have a dialectical structure.

Dialectic, from the Greek *διαλεκτική τεχνη*, means the art of discussion or debate leading to "an understanding of things that keeps moving." (Heinze 2009, p.119) Being a debate, it involves different opinions which show different aspects of the object of debate. These aspects might be opposed or contradictory, but most importantly they are simply distinct. Finding a shared understanding, this understanding is never final because the distinctness of the aspects is maintained. Hegel, famous for his dialectical method (Forster 1993, p.130), has a slightly different conception of dialectic: He sees dialectic as a method of exposition which first shows our categories to be self-contradictory always comprising their opposites and then develops them into a new category that preserves the opposites but overcomes their contradiction (Forster 1993, p.132). The contradictory opposites

(2003, p.291). A similar thought can be found in Merleau-Ponty's work on the body which is described as "ambiguous" (1945, pt.1) and has recently been taken up by Fuchs (2010; 2005).

form the polarity identified earlier as the structure underlying self-reflection. Following the Greek model, this polarity does not have to be seen as a contradiction however, but can rather be understood to express the diversity of aspects of human life (Heinze 2009, p.121). Despite this re-interpretation, Hegel's characterisation of dialectic remains useful in distinguishing two moments of a dialectical movement; these moments can be called negative and positive. The negative moment shows the polarity i.e. it differentiates aspects of an experience which was formerly experienced as a homogenous unity. The differentiated aspects become the apparently opposed poles. This can also be called explication. Terming it the 'negative' moment is in line with the understanding of self-reflection expressed in the myth of Narcissus and by Dreyfus' challenge: On these conceptions, it is the differentiation that represents a danger, i.e. which is negative, because the polarity it creates is understood as a contradiction forcing us to relinquish one of the differentia. On my conception however, the negative moment merely makes the differentia appear in their distinctness without favouring one over the other. The positive moment then synthesises these differentiated aspects i.e. it re-establishes the unity by showing how they inextricably belong together. The distinctness of the aspects is thereby preserved; the synthesis provides awareness of distinctness in unity or of differentiated unity. Negative and positive moment of the dialectic, differentiation and unification, are therefore of equal importance (Capone Braga 1957, p.1552). The synthesis is not final but the beginning of a new cycle of differentiation and synthesis (ibid.). In divergence from Hegel who holds that the dialectic ultimately culminates and ends in the absolute (ibid.), I hold with Jaspers that "[I]t is fundamentally characteristic of our temporal human situation that we cannot accomplish such a [final] synthesis." (1997, p.343) i.e. that every synthesis remains tentative and that self-reflection is therefore a never-ending dialectical process. The understanding or knowledge it yields thus "keeps moving", an aspect that is going to be explored in the next section.

Looking back at Natorp's and Dreyfus' challenges, one sees that they conceive of self-reflection as confined to the negative moment and that they understand the differentiation shown by it as a contradiction. It has already been said that this interpretation is mistaken and that the differentiation should be understood as an expression of the diverse aspects of human life rather than as a contradiction. Moreover, I hold against Natorp's and Dreyfus' view that self-reflection comprises both moments, the negative and the positive. The positive moment reunifies the differentiated aspects. Thus, the differentiation brought about by the negative moment does not become hostile to the

implicitness and subjectivity of lived life which is always a unity. Together, both moments of the dialectic give rise to a new awareness of an experience which is an awareness of differentiated unity.

In the case of self-reflection in the narrow sense where the negative moment differentiates a subjective and an objective aspect of an experience, the positive moment reveals how subject and object are related. Thereby, self-reflection becomes a valuable means to investigate one's subjectivity. In the case of reflecting about one's actions, the negative moment differentiates immersed and conceptual aspects of experiencing an action, while the positive moment shows how the one is implied in the other and thereby makes self-reflection and action compatible.

Despite avoiding the problems associated with traditional accounts of self-reflection and thus paying justice to the important role that is attributed to self-reflection for healthy human psychic life, is a dialectical method convincing? Criticisms fall into two categories: The one criticises dialectic for insisting too much on contradiction and opposition, whereas the other criticises it for insisting too much on unity (Siebers 2009, p.130).

Regarding the first criticism, it has already been said that the polarity emphasised by a dialectical method is better understood to express the diversity of aspects of human life than to represent a logical contradiction (Heinze 2009, p.121) I will therefore focus on the second criticism which objects that a dialectical method promises the achievement of something final and relies on an absolute ending point. This idea is indeed prominent in Hegel's work and Jaspers equally emphasises the idea of a whole (Jaspers 1997, pt.6). His claim that self-reflection has a hierarchical structure culminating in self-revelation (ibid., pp.349-350) can be seen to express this idea as it relies on this whole as an ending point. Regarding Jaspers however, this conception can be criticised by appeal to his own insistence that a final synthesis is never accomplished by humans (1997, p.343) and that self-understanding or self-knowledge is therefore importantly inconclusive (ibid., p.357). Final unity never being reached, its importance for the dialectical method can be questioned and Hegel's starkly teleological conception of dialectic can be contrasted with a conception that, in Plessner's words, sees dialectic as an "affirmation of total playfulness as mental health." (Siebers 2009, p.131) i.e. that conceives of human psychic life as essentially open and dynamic. The question remains however what this dynamic is

initiated by and why the polar structure causes a ceaseless movement. This can only be accounted for if one assumes that “[h]umans have a need for unity.” (Heinze 2009, p.121) and therefore strive to unify polarities and what is differentiated. Accepting unity as a basic human need is not the same though as stipulating the existence of a final ending point. Given that one accepts this need, it is possible to conceive of self-reflection as a dialectical process in the non-Hegelian manner outlined above. Self-reflection can then be regained as a valuable activity to find insight into oneself.

The effects of dialectical self-reflection

With the dialectical account of self-reflection in place, it can then be described as a process that differentiates distinct dimensions of a primary experience and that by revealing the relatedness of these dimensions gives rise to a new experience. The nature of this new experience is going to be explored in this section. Holding self-reflection to be a process in which one deliberately engages, the nature of this new experience also has to account for the motivation to do so.

As a dialectical process, self-reflection comprises a negative and a positive moment. In the case of self-reflection in the narrow sense, the negative moment breaks up the unified experience of subject and object (which in this case is the subject tentatively seen as something other than itself) and shows them in their distinctness. The positive moment draws them back together, revealing their relatedness while retaining their distinct features. What is won is awareness of their relatedness in separation, i.e. of a differentiated unity. Pre-reflectively, this unity was experienced as undifferentiated. Fuchs, drawing on Michael Polanyi, characterises the tacit, implicit as emerging through “processes of gestalt formation that enable us to understand wholes and meaningful complexes instead of individual elements” (Fuchs 2010, p.240). My claim now is that self-reflection equally is a process of gestalt formation, the emerging gestalt being a reflective sense of self. If the implicit emerges through a process of gestalt formation, then self-reflection can be called a higher-order process of gestalt formation. The emerging gestalt, the reflective sense of self, is explicit however, explication being the bringing to awareness of the differentiation of the unity. Self-reflection in the narrow and the broad sense both contribute to the reflective sense of self, which can be seen as the sum total of the syntheses of all self-reflective processes. Jaspers, describing the effects of self-reflection, calls what I have termed the reflective sense of self

“awareness of personality” and characterises it as “always composed of two inseparable constituents: a feeling of self-valuation and the plain awareness of one’s particular being.” (1997, p.353) It is thus an awareness of oneself as a differentiated whole.

The reflective sense of self is not basic in the sense of being co-given in all conscious experience as pre-reflective self-consciousness is. It is also not basic in so far as it is an awareness of one’s differentiation and complexity. As self-reflective activity is a constitutive feature of human psychic life however, the reflective sense of self is as well.

Self-reflection being a constitutive feature of human psychic life, it is inescapable; at times, everybody self-reflects. It does not follow from this however that self-reflection is uncontrollable passively going on at all times. On the contrary, it is possible to deliberately engage in self-reflection. Self-reflection is in this respect similar to a natural process like sleep: To a certain degree, we can control when we sleep and how much we sleep, but sometimes everybody does sleep. Once again, it is important at this point to distinguish self-reflection from reflexivity, the latter being a solely passive process happening in the background at all times and constituting the very structure of consciousness. Self-reflection, although inevitably happening sometimes, is an active process in which one can deliberately engage.

What are the reasons to do so i.e. what benefits are expected from self-reflection? For an example of someone engaging in self-reflection, consider Antonio’s opening lines in *The Merchant of Venice*:

In sooth I know not why I am so sad.
 It wearies me: you say it wearies you;
 But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
 What stuff ‘tis made of, whereof it is born,
 I am to learn;
 And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
 That I have much ado to know myself.
 (Shakespeare 2005, I.1, 1-7)

Antonio feels sad and does not know why. He does not know why he became sad, nor what his sadness consists in. Saying that he has “much ado” to know himself means that he will engage in an active process in order to find out. This active process is self-reflection and the benefit he expects is self-knowledge.

What however is understood by self-knowledge? Lowe for example uses the term to refer to the “particular *de re* knowledge of the identity of one’s own conscious thoughts and experiences” (1996, p.182). This particular knowledge, he thinks, is co-given in conscious experience:

Our own thoughts and experiences, when present and conscious, are not presented to us as objects of our awareness, but as constituents of it, and for that reason inalienably ours. (ibid., p.191)

Self-knowledge on this view is then what phenomenologists have termed pre-reflective self-consciousness, the feeling of phenomenal mineness. But this is not what Antonio is looking for when he says that he wants to know himself for he is clearly aware of it being his sadness. The gap which he perceives between himself and his sadness is not a gap in terms of a lack of sense of ownership but in terms of not being able to meaningfully relate this feeling to his life. According to Lowe’s use of the term self-knowledge, Antonio knows himself already.

Another use of the term self-knowledge is suggested by Carruther’s paper “How we know our own minds” (2009) where knowing oneself amounts to attribute the correct mental states to oneself. But in this sense as well, Antonio knows himself already, for he knows that he is sad. Yet he is not content with this kind of self-knowledge because he still does not know why. Can self-reflection answer this question? And if so, is the answer correctly termed self-knowledge?

Earlier it was mentioned that according to McDowell, action’s being permeated with rationality permits to ask and answer the why-question i.e. to find out about one’s motivations to perform a certain action. That means that the structure of our action makes action in principal accessible to self-reflection, a rational process, and allows self-reflection to yield cognitively valuable results. If self-reflection can yield such results however does not only depend on the structure of our action or generally the structure of its object, but also on the structure of self-reflection itself. This structure was identified to be dialectical. Now Jaspers holds that “[d]ialectic is the form in which a basic aspect of meaningful connections becomes accessible to us” (1997, p.345). Meaningful connections place a singular psychological phenomenon into the context of one’s life (ibid., p.303), they connect it to other psychological phenomena and reveal its source (ibid., p.301). Thereby the merely given can become accepted, a singular event history and a life someone’s biography. Generally speaking, an

individual psychological phenomenon can thus be experienced as significant (ibid., p.349). A dialectical process is able to bring meaningful connections to the fore as it differentiates the various aspects of psychological phenomena and then synthesises these distinct singular aspects into a differentiated unity i.e. shows the relatedness of these aspects. The assumption, of course, is that meaning lies in the context, in the web of interconnected psychological phenomena and their diverse aspects, not in individual psychological phenomena by themselves.

Such meaningful connections are what Antonio is looking for when he asks the why-question: He wants to find out the source of his sadness, explore the feeling in its various facets and connect it to other feelings like his and his friend's feeling weary. Self-reflection, conceived of as a dialectical process, will be able to provide him with answers to these queries.

Importantly however "[t]he realm of meaning is unbounded" (ibid., p.315) i.e. there is no one final and definite meaning, but always room for further and different meaningful connections between the various aspects of psychological phenomena. In contrast to Hegel's conception of dialectic on which it culminates and ends in a final synthesis, my conception of dialectic regarding self-reflection is therefore open-ended and the understanding it yields always remains inconclusive (ibid., 357). Such conception can be called hermeneutical. Jaspers describes this dialectical and hermeneutical process of understanding in the following way:

We achieve understanding within a *circular movement from particular facts to the whole* that includes them and *back again from the whole* thus reached to the particular significant facts. The circle continually expands itself and tests and changes itself meaningfully in all its parts. A final 'terra firma' is never reached. (ibid.)

The particular facts are the individual psychological phenomena and their various, potentially opposed aspects which are differentiated by the negative moment of the dialectic. The whole is the synthesis reached in the positive moment of the dialectic, showing the relatedness of the individual aspects and containing them. This synthesis is inconclusive however, it can be and is indeed differentiated again itself, thus leading to a new round of negative and positive moment.

The synthesis being inconclusive is why Sartre thinks of self-reflection, which he takes to be the attempt to achieve unity, as a failure. Yet it is precisely this failure which motivates the dialectical movement to go on as it maintains the difference the experience of which is

required for understanding (Gadamer 1960, p.273). The latter lies in the synthesis, but the need for synthesis only arises through the experience of difference. The synthesis is then carried out in an “anticipation of completeness” (ibid., p.299) i.e. of overcoming the difference, this anticipated completeness acting as a regulative ideal without ever being reached and difference being forever maintained. Despite not achieving a final goal, this process is productive giving rise to understanding and creating new meaning (ibid., p.301). Inconclusiveness being an essential characteristic of meaning and meaningful human life, the negative undertone of the Sartrean term failure is misleading.

It is debatable whether the understanding yielded by self-reflection is correctly termed self-knowledge. Jaspers for example holds that “self-reflection is something essentially different from knowledge” (1997, p.349) and that “[i]f we desire final knowledge in the field of self-understanding, we have made a completely wrong start (ibid., p.350). The conception of knowledge underlying this clear distinction between knowledge and understanding sees knowledge to require “an object which will continue to exist and be available” (ibid., p.349), to be “quiet stability” (ibid.) instead of ongoing movement, to be “certain” and “final” (ibid., p.350). Such conception of knowledge is widespread in Western thought (Wild 1979, p.17) and the understanding yielded by self-reflection certainly and importantly does not fulfil these criteria: its object changes as the hermeneutical round moves on and a final certainty is never achieved. Furthermore, whereas knowledge is seen to be general, meaningful connections only hold between aspects of particular psychological phenomena and understanding is therefore concrete (Jaspers 1997, p.314).

If this is ground enough to give up the notion of self-knowledge regarding the effects of self-reflection and to adopt the notion of self-understanding instead, or if the notion of self-knowledge can be kept while being aware of its special characteristics seems to be a merely terminological issue. What is important is that self-reflection provides us with significance the latter being essentially inconclusive and that self-reflection is therefore a never-ending process.

Another interesting aspect of the effects of self-reflection which, due to the limited scope of this essay, cannot be explored in detail, is the relation of self-reflection and normativity. According to Korsgaard, raising “the normative question is to ask whether our more unreflective beliefs and motives can withstand the test of reflection.” (1996, p.47) and normativity therefore “is a problem for human beings because of our reflective nature.” (ibid.,

p.49) This link between self-reflection and normativity becomes especially clear when self-reflection is described as a process of self-alteration. I have formerly characterised the effects of the negative moment of self-reflection as the bringing to awareness of differentiation. Zahavi describes the same phenomenon saying that “reflection is [...] a kind of self-awareness that is essentially characterised by an internal division, difference, and *alterity*.” (2005, p.91) Developing the idea of alterity further, Sartre holds impure reflection to try to look at one’s own experience as if it was someone else’s (2003, e.g. p.360). On his view, this gaze of the other is always objectifying and therefore hostile to subjectivity. Yet it was shown that this is because Sartre, like many others, wrongly conceives of subject and object, self and other, as strictly mutually exclusive. If they are not, self-reflection being an alteration of a primary experience means that it differentiates the formerly unified experience and shows it in its various aspects one of which is the aspect of being seen from the perspective of someone else. Only because the unified experience of an action, belief or desire is differentiated can the normative question be asked. Also, the apparent opposition of the subjective and the objective has a special relevance regarding normativity. The term normativity can be seen to include a notion of objectivity in so far as a norm has to be considered not only to have authority for oneself but also for others. But a norm can only influence one’s action if it is considered as a part of one’s subjectively lived life (Nagel 1979, p.205). By its synthesising activity, self-reflection could possibly offer a way in which to reconcile these potentially conflicting, but most importantly simply different, dimensions whose coexistence is “an irreducible fact of life.” (ibid., p.213)

Part III: Psychopathology and Self-Reflection

Too much or too little? Pathologies both ways

Describing self-reflection as a dialectical process including a negative, differentiating alongside with a positive, synthesising moment allowed for explication without relinquishing the implicit, and thus refuted claims that self-reflection is inherently dangerous, be it as “the enemy of expertise” (Dreyfus 2007, p.354) or as a fatal endeavour leading to self-loss as in the case of Narcissus. Nevertheless, as Dreyfus’ and Jaspers’ examples show, there remains a risk implied in self-reflection (Jaspers 1997, p.342) which needs to be accounted for. This risk and the relation of self-reflection and psychopathology are going to be explored in the following section. Once more in this respect, it is important to bear in mind the distinction

between the passive process of reflexivity which is an inherent feature of consciousness on the one hand and the active, cognitive process of reflection on the other hand.

Disturbances of self-reflection are appealed to regarding a variety of psychiatric disorders. Fuchs (2010) for example accounts for insomnia, compulsive disorders, hypochondria, body dysmorphic disorder and schizophrenia in terms of an excess of self-reflection. Dimaggio et al. (2009) consider disorders of self-reflection to be involved in schizophrenia, alexithymia, posttraumatic stress disorder and a generally poor capacity to integrate inconsistent feelings and behaviours. To explore whether, as they tentatively try to establish (*ibid.*, p.659ff), there is one disturbance underlying all of these conditions is beyond the scope of this essay. A point to consider for further research in this respect is a disparity of aspects which seems to be present in all the above mentioned disorders⁸. On all accounts, the link between self-reflection and psychopathology is seen in quantitative terms i.e. the psychopathological phenomenon is accounted for by either an excess or a lack of self-reflection. Jaspers in this vein repeatedly stresses the importance of the balance between reflection and non-reflection (1997, p.131). On his view, symptoms of mental illness arise when this balance is disturbed. In the case of too little self-reflection, a lack of intentional control follows and one feels overpowered by and helplessly delivered to what is simply happening (*ibid.*). In the case of too much self-reflection on the other hand, one's intention can have unintended effects on what is happening: it can get in the way of the natural flow of action as described by Dreyfus and it can disturb bodily, instinctual functions like urination, sleep and sexual intercourse (*ibid.*). Compulsion, being characterised by the discrepancy of what one believes to be justified and what one feels compelled to (*ibid.*, p.134), is equally linked with self-reflection as it is only through self-reflection, more precisely through the negative moment of self-reflection, that one can become aware of the separateness of these two aspects of one's motivation.⁹

⁸ In compulsive disorders and insomnia, what one rationally intends stands opposed to what one actually does or to what happens (Jaspers 1997, p.133). In hypochondria and body dysmorphic disorder the actually healthy state of the body cannot account for the perceived fear of illness or feeling of abnormality (Fuchs 2010, pp.244-245). In alexithymia, one observes a decoupling of experiential and physiological arousal, the former being low, the latter high (e.g. Stone & Nielson 2001). Posttraumatic stress disorders are characterised by the incapacity to sufficiently distinguish between the fantasy of intruding, threatening memories and reality in which the sufferer is safe (Megías et al. 2007). In schizophrenia finally, several such disparities can be observed, e.g. the patient's lack of insight into their illness (Kraepelin 2010; van der Meer et al. 2010, p.943) but also, experientially for the patient, the lack of agency i.e. the disparity between observed action of her body and perceived feeling of control and initiation of this action (Franck et al. 2001).

⁹ Jaspers' characterisation of compulsion is similar to the Greek concept of *akrasia* which describes the phenomenon of acting against one's own rational belief (Aristotle 2002, bk.VII, chap. 3). In Sartre's work, the same phenomenon figures under the name of "bad faith" (Sartre 2003, pp.70-94).

In the following section, the conception of psychopathologies as quantitative disturbances of self-reflection is going to be challenged. Facing the multitude of psychopathologies which are seen to be related to disturbances of self-reflection, the analysis will focus on the role that self-reflection plays in schizophrenia. It will be shown that by adopting a dialectical account of self-reflection, a structural rather than a quantitative disturbance of the latter can account for the symptoms experienced in schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia and Self-Reflection

Schizophrenia is one of the classic psychiatric diagnoses that is, according to Kurt Schneider's first-rank symptoms, characterised by audible thoughts, hearing of voices arguing, discussing or commenting, somatic passivity experiences, thought withdrawal and other experiences of influenced thought, thought broadcasting, delusional perceptions and all other experiences involving made volition, made affect and made impulses (Berner et al. 1992, p.21). The diagnostic criteria currently used in clinical practice are laid down in the ICD-10 (World Health Organization 1992, sec. F20) and the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association 2000, sec.295-298.9). From a cognitivist point of view, lack of insight into the disease, termed anosognosia, and deficits in social cognition are typical (van der Meer et al. 2010, p.943). Recently, researchers from various fields have started exploring the link between self-reflection and schizophrenia hoping to identify a common feature underlying the various symptoms. In this respect, neuroimaging studies support the view that self-reflective processes are altered in patients suffering from schizophrenia (ibid.)¹⁰.

Beck et al. (2004) conceive of this alteration as a deficit. Taking their starting point from Kraepelin's (2010) view that anosognosia is centrally involved in schizophrenia, they devised a questionnaire to assess patients' insight into their illness by exploring items on two scales, self-reflectiveness and self-certainty. By self-reflectiveness they understand the ability to take an objective view on one's cognitive distortions, the ability to put these into perspective, and the openness to corrective feedback (ibid., pp. 320-322). They found these abilities to be significantly decreased in patients suffering from schizophrenia, whereas the patients' self-

¹⁰ In their review of 20 neuroimaging studies exploring the neurological basis of self-reflection, van der Meer et al. (2010) found concurrent evidence for the involvement of so-called Cortical Midline Structures CMS (especially the medial prefrontal cortex MPFC, posterior cingulate cortex PCC and anterior cingulate cortex ACC) in self-reflective processes. In schizophrenia, an altered function of the ventral MPFC was found by most studies. Holt et al. (2011) specified this alteration as an anterior-posterior shift of activation in the CMS.

certainty i.e. their conviction to be right, was increased (ibid., p.325). The observed anosognosia is thus attributed to a lack of self-reflection. A study exploring the relation between cognitive impairment and anosognosia could not attribute anosognosia to a general cognitive impairment and saw an alteration in the activation-patterns of the CMS (Ries et al. 2007) thus suggesting that self-reflection and general cognitive capacities are distinct and that it is indeed a deficit of the former that accounts for the lack of insight. According to Beck's account, schizophrenia is thus a disorder that centrally involves too little self-reflection.

In apparent opposition to these findings stands research that holds schizophrenia to be characterised by overmentalisation (Abu-Akel 1999) or hyperreflexivity (Sass & Parnas 2003; Fuchs 2010). Differing from the Kraepelian emphasis of empirically observable phenomena, these studies are conducted in the tradition of phenomenological psychopathology and “focus on the study of subjectivity in schizophrenia” (Sass et al. 2011, p.1) i.e. on the phenomenal experience of the patient. Importantly however, both traditions are not to be seen in stark contrast to each other; especially in recent years, more and more empirical studies have provided support for “the reality of clinical-phenomenal disorders of self-experience” in schizophrenia (ibid., p.2) (for an overview see Parnas & Sass 2010).

It is important to note that these authors speak of reflexivity, not of self-reflection. There seems to be confusion however: Fuchs uses the terms interchangeably (2010, p.239) and Sass et al's distinction (2011, p.12) remains unclear. I will argue in the next section that what they mean falls in fact under what this essay has so far established as self-reflection. For the ongoing presentation of their account however, I will stick to their term “hyperreflexivity”.

Hyperreflexivity is one element of Sass and Parnas' “Ipseity-Hyperreflexivity-Model” (Sass et al. 2011) with which they hope to account for the apparent heterogeneity of schizophrenic symptoms. Ipseity being “the sense of [...] self that is normally implicit in each act of awareness” (ibid., p.7), in other words, pre-reflective self-consciousness or the sense of phenomenal mineness which is also referred to as minimal self (ibid.), they hold this basic sense of self to be disturbed in schizophrenia. This results in diminished self-affection i.e. “a diminished sense of being a vital, first-person perspective on the world” (ibid.) on the one hand and hyperreflexivity i.e. “exaggerated self-consciousness involving self-alienation” (Sass & Parnas 2003, p.429) on the other hand. Both disturbances revolve around the implicit-explicit dimension and are complementary to each other:

Whereas the notion of hyperreflexivity emphasizes the way in which something normally tacit becomes focal and explicit, the notion of diminished self-affection

emphasizes a complementary aspect of this very same process- the fact that what once *was* tacit is no longer being inhabited as a medium of taken-for-granted selfhood. (ibid., p.430)

The balance between implicit, or tacit, and explicit, thus is the claim, is disturbed in schizophrenia, it is shifted towards the explicit. Hyperreflexivity, seen as the making explicit of what is and should be implicit, goes hand in hand with the diminished self-affection i.e. a loss of implicitness. If the latter, the deficit in pre-reflective self-consciousness, is at the root of the symptoms as the description of schizophrenia as a self-disorder (ibid., p.427) suggests, then hyperreflexivity can be seen as a “compensatory hyperfunctioning of aspects of the self-reflection system” (Dimaggio et al. 2009, p.660). Hyperreflexivity on this model however entails loss of implicitness and the two aspects of the disorder thus reinforce each other. Fuchs (2010) adopts a similar understanding of hyperreflexivity.

How does this model apply to the symptoms encountered in schizophrenia? One of the most characteristic symptoms is voice-hearing as for example described by Jaspers’ patient Kieser (Jaspers 1997, p.73):

Sometimes I could hear one and the same word repeated without interruption for two to three hours. I had to listen to long continuous speeches about me; frequently the content was insulting and there was often an imitation of well-known persons. [...] Sometimes one could only just hear these incessant, uninterrupted sounds but sometimes one could hear them a half or full mile away. [...] All the time my ears keep ringing and sometimes so loudly that it can be heard far and wide. When I am among woods or bushes and the weather is stormy, some horrible, demoniacal poltergeist is aroused; when it is quiet, each tree starts rustling and uttering words and phrases when I approach.

The distinction between inside and outside, self and other, appears blurred. Is it his ears that are ringing or is it the trees that are talking to him? Alongside many others, Sass and Parnas interpret what the patient hears as external voices as in fact inner speech which the patient fails to recognise as her own (2003, p.432). They account for the failure of recognition by the deficit of implicitness of the inner speech i.e. by its lack in feeling of mineness, combined with it having become explicit through hyper-reflexive activity. Inner speech is the usually implicit mode of thinking (ibid., p.433).

It appears then that the auditory-verbal hallucinations most characteristic of schizophrenia (“first rank symptoms”) involve a sense of alienation from and a bringing-to-explicit-awareness of the processes of consciousness itself. (ibid.)

Another symptom observed in schizophrenic patients is the feeling of being caught up in thought. Blankenburg's patient Anne expresses this saying that "It is impossible for [her] to stop [her]self from thinking" (Blankenburg 1971, p.46). In the same context, de Haan and Fuchs cite a patient reporting:

I constantly have to ask myself "who am I really?" It is hard to explain ... most of the time, I have this very strange thing: I watch myself closely, like, how am I doing now and where are the "parts" – [...]. And that occupies me so much, to think about my condition, because it is not just one condition, it is always more conditions, that is exactly what is not functioning. I think about that so much that I get to nothing else. (2010, p.329)

This excessive act of thinking, interpreted as hyperreflexivity, is seen to be an inadequate try to compensate for the diminished pre-reflective self-consciousness; inadequate because the implicit self-assuredness cannot be re-established through making it explicit (Fuchs 2010, pp.248-249). On the contrary, excessive engagement in self-reflection and self-observation leads to even further estrangement. Consequently, a vicious circle develops. This can result in the complete loss of natural action:

If I do something like going for a drink of water, I've to go over each detail- find cup, walk over, turn tap, fill cup, turn tap off, drink it. (Chapman 1966, p.239)

Here, the most mundane action becomes a complex task as through hyperreflexivity, consciousness is flooded "with sensory data to a degree beyond the limits of normal experience". (ibid., p. 225) i.e. with explicit sensory data that usually form the implicit, tacit background of an action.

To summarise, it can be said that the above-mentioned authors see the relation between schizophrenia and self-reflection in too much of a self-reflection the result of which is too much explicitness. Explicitness on their part implies a loss of implicitness. It is suggested that an initial deficit in implicitness in the form of diminished pre-reflective self-consciousness i.e. a diminished feeling of experiential mineness, underlies the exaggerated self-reflective process.

The phenomenological characterisation of schizophrenia as a hyper-reflexive disorder thus stands in direct opposition to the view supported for example by Beck et al (2004) that schizophrenia is characterised by a lack of self-reflection. "Too much or too little?" thus seems to be the question when considering both accounts. Yet it will be shown that this is the

wrong question to ask as by adopting a dialectical account of self-reflection, schizophrenic symptoms can be accounted for by a structural disturbance of schizophrenia rather than attributing them to a quantitative abnormality. Regarding the apparent contradiction of the Beckian and the Sassian account, it has to be noted that the two characterisations concern different manifestations of schizophrenia: whereas the Beckian account aims to explain anosognosia as it is observed by the clinician, the phenomenological account tries to shed light on phenomena like voice-hearing and being caught up in thought as the patient experiences them. Given the different perspectives, first-person and third-person, the opposite interpretation of the role of self-reflection perhaps does not have to take wonder. It would be desirable however to be able to give an account of the relation of self-reflection and schizophrenia that can accommodate the phenomena seen from both perspectives. It will emerge from the following critical analysis that a dialectical account of self-reflection is capable to provide precisely this besides, as mentioned above, allowing a quantitative description of the disturbance of self-reflection.

First of all, it must be stressed that Sass et al. provide a very well observed phenomenological description of schizophrenic symptoms and that their Ipseity-Hyperreflexivity-Model (2011) is compelling for it identifies a single disturbance which underlies the various symptoms of schizophrenia and which can also account for a fundamentally altered (self-) experience. My critique does therefore not concern the description of the symptoms, but the conception of self-reflection underlying the Ipseity-Hyperreflexivity-Model. As Fuchs seems to embrace this model in his recent paper on hyperreflexivity (2010), my critique applies to his position as well.

Fuchs uses the terms 'reflexivity' and 'reflection' interchangeably (ibid.). It could be objected however that Sass et al. (2011) do not speak of self-reflection at all but of hyperreflexivity and that it is therefore mistaken to relate their account of schizophrenia to the work on self-reflection of this essay. Yet it was mentioned earlier that Sass et al.'s distinction of the terms 'reflexivity' and 'reflection' remains unclear. Unfortunately, they only define the pathological forms, 'hyperreflexivity' and 'hyperreflection', the former as leading to an "automatic popping-up or popping-out of phenomena and processes that would normally remain in the tacit background of awareness [...], but that now come to be experienced in an objectified and alienated manner." (ibid., p.7). Hyperreflexivity also involves intellectual and volitional processes (ibid., p.12). Assuming that the non-pathological form, reflexivity, has the same structure and only less pronounced effects, their conception of reflexivity seems to

be close to what Dreyfus calls self-reflection and, in so far as one refrains from the negative evaluation of explication, to our everyday understanding of the term. Sass et al are keen however to distinguish reflexivity from reflection, holding the latter to be an “intellectual or volitional process of a “higher” nature” (ibid.). Yet what they mean by ‘higher nature’ remains unclear seeing that on their picture, reflexivity brings tacit background phenomena to a new awareness which in my understanding is thereby of a ‘higher nature’ already. I therefore suggest that the term ‘reflexivity’ be saved for the turned-back structure of consciousness which gives rise to the feeling of phenomenal mineness, i.e. to pre-reflective self-consciousness. Reflexivity then is a non-volitional, non-intellectual process in keeping with non-thematic consciousness¹¹. In contrast, reflection is an intellectual process, partly volitional, bringing about a thematic awareness of the experiences reflected upon and thereby being, in Sass et al’s words, of a ‘higher nature’. In the following, I will understand Sass et al.’s hyperreflexivity as hyperreflection and use the latter term.

Is it then convincing to characterise schizophrenia as a disorder of hyperreflection? The above definition of hyperreflexivity shows a stark opposition of “tacit” on the one hand and “objectified” on the other hand. Self-reflection is situated on the objectified-side of the opposition. Fuchs expresses this view of self-reflection as follows:

Reflexive consciousness, the turning back of attention to the process of life itself, can also exercise an analytical, decomposing effect, as it were, on the implicit couplings of embodiment. Then we can literally not see the forest for the trees- a phenomenon that I would describe as the *explication of the implicit*. [...] A further insight is to be gained here: reflexive consciousness is not capable of, so to speak, going back to the sources of embodied enactions [...]. (2010, pp.241-242)

The “*explication of the implicit*” being seen to imply the loss of the implicit, this view of self-reflection brings back the image of self-reflection as inherently dangerous for lived life. An excess of it is then necessarily even more dangerous. This conception of self-reflection however could be refuted by showing that implicit and explicit are not mutually exclusive and led to developing a dialectical account of self-reflection on which self-reflection is itself a form of life and does therefore not represent a danger to it.

Yet I agree that in schizophrenia something goes fundamentally wrong with self-reflection, and that the balance between implicit and explicit is shifted towards the explicit which thereby becomes disconnected and dominant. Patients clearly experience being caught up in

¹¹ Interestingly, on this conception, hyperreflexivity would lead to an excess of pre-reflective self-consciousness whereas Sass et al. want to hold that the latter, to which they refer as self-affection, is diminished in schizophrenia.

self-reflective thought as shown in the above examples. How can this be accounted for by a dialectical account of self-reflection? On this account, the negative moment of the dialectic differentiates what was formerly experienced as a unity, it brings about a separation of aspects of this experience and in so far destroys the unity which is characteristic of implicitness. But in healthy self-reflection, the positive moment ensues and synthesises these aspects, showing their relatedness in the new light of having experienced their separation i.e. re-establishing the unity on a higher level. My claim now is that it is this synthesising moment of self-reflection that is deficient in schizophrenia and that schizophrenia is thus a disturbance of the structure of self-reflection rather than a quantitative divergence from the norm for self-reflective activity. The insight that synthesis is impaired in schizophrenia can already be found in Jaspers who points out the “*failure to unify*” resulting in the “*drastic realisation of one tendency without its counter-tendency*” (1997, p.343). Regarding passivity phenomena like voice-hearing and thought insertion, it can then be said that they result from the failure to unify the objective aspects of one’s experience with its subjective aspects. Similarly, the experience of being caught up in thought ensues from the inability to establish the tie between thinking and action, to experience thinking itself as action and as such as action-guiding. Finally, the lack of insight which is observed from the perspective of another person can be accounted for in terms of a deficit in relating self-observances i.e. cognitive insight to the experience of oneself. This tallies with Beck et al.’s claim that schizophrenia is characterised by denial of the illness, their claim being in fact more specific than it at first seems: Namely, they speak of there being a discrepancy between emotional and intellectual insight (2004, p.320), between accepting an explanation and being convinced by it (ibid.). This exactly expresses the inability to incorporate facts one knows about oneself from self-observance into one’s self-experience i.e. once again the failure to unify objective and subjective aspects of an experience. Thus a dialectical account is able to accommodate the phenomena described by Beck et al. from a third-person perspective as well as the phenomena which Sass et al. find in first-person reports. The result of this disturbance of self-reflection is a disturbed reflective sense of self as the latter, established in part II, emerges from the sum total of the syntheses of all self-reflective processes.

To conclude, schizophrenia should be understood as a disturbance of self-reflection, not, as Sass et al. hold, of reflexivity. If one then conceives of self-reflection as a dialectical process, it is possible to give a qualitative account of the disturbance which appears to lie in a deficit of the synthesising moment. Such an account gives us a richer understanding of the nature of

the disturbance than a merely quantitative account can provide. The characterisation of schizophrenia as a self-disturbance can be maintained if one holds that in healthy individuals a reflective sense of self naturally accompanies the pre-reflective one. However, this reflective sense of self is not what Sass et al. call the “fully constituted self” (2011, p.11) or the “self-as-object” (ibid.) and they are right in saying that the self-disturbance seen in schizophrenia affects something more basic ¹². Conceiving of self-reflection as a dialectical movement differentiating equally important aspects of a unified experience and showing them in their relatedness explains why self-reflection and the reflective sense of self are of such central importance for human psychic life and why a disturbance has such fundamental consequences. The analysis of the relation of self-reflection and schizophrenia thus affirms the centrality of self-reflection in human psychic life and supports its dialectical structure.

Conclusions

This essay originated from the confusing situation in which we find ourselves when we consider the Delphian calling to self-knowledge, presumably to be pursued by means of self-reflection, and then hear Tiresias’s warning to Narcissus that he should only live long if he never comes to know himself. Seeing the tragic consequences that ensue when Narcissus reflects himself, should we ignore the Delphian calling and give up self-reflection? Analysing the risk of self-reflection as illustrated in the myth of Narcissus by considering Natorp’s and Dreyfus’ challenges, a polar structure underlying self-reflection could be identified and it could be shown that the risk arises due to a conception of self-reflection that sees the involved poles, for example subject and object, action and rationality, as mutually exclusive opposites.

¹² By saying that the reflective sense of self is something more basic, I do not suggest that it should be equated with the minimal sense of self i.e. ipseity. Both are clearly distinct. If, as Sass et al. (2011) hold, the latter is disturbed in schizophrenia can be questioned I think. It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine this aspect in detail. Due to the centrality of the ipseity-disorder on Sass et al.’s model, it should be mentioned however that Zahavi for example points out in an earlier paper that “[...] since the afflicted subject is aware that it is he himself rather than somebody else who is experiencing these foreign thoughts, that is, since the subject does not confuse thoughts occurring in foreign minds with foreign thoughts occurring in his own mind, it is questionable whether these “foreign” thoughts really lack the quality of “mineness”, whether they really lack the first-person mode of givenness.” (2001, p.340) It seems that ipseity is preserved in these severe disturbances, that the minimal self remains intact. It is impossible to hold that the sense of first-person givenness of experience is lost in schizophrenia unless one wanted to say that schizophrenic patients lack phenomenal consciousness altogether, as this sense of mineness, this basic form of self-consciousness, is constitutive of intentional consciousness. It is also the pre-condition for self-reflection as shown in part I i.e. hyperreflection cannot take place without there being ipseity. Sass et al. (2011) clearly embrace this relation between pre-reflective self-consciousness, intentional consciousness (ibid., p.9) and self-reflection. Now they do not claim that ipseity is entirely lost, but only that it is disturbed. Given that ipseity is a simple phenomenon however, a minimal self, I am unclear about what a disturbance can possibly consist in.

Refuting their mutual exclusiveness, the poles could be interpreted as different aspects of an experience and self-reflection consequently conceived of as a dialectical process, differentiating these aspects in a negative moment and showing them in their inextricable relatedness i.e. synthesising them, in the entailing positive moment. Self-reflection could thus be regained as a valuable means to gain insight into oneself, bringing about an awareness of oneself as differentiated unity. The awareness of this unity provides meaning and can be termed self-knowledge bearing in mind the essential inconclusiveness of the achieved unity.

Applying the dialectical account to the psychopathology of schizophrenia, it could be shown that the latter does not have to be conceived of in terms of a quantitative disturbance of self-reflection, too much or too little, but should be understood as a qualitative disturbance, namely a disturbance of the positive, synthesising moment. Thus, the findings of a cognitivist approach and the findings of a phenomenological approach could be reconciled. The possibility of such a disturbance can account for Narcissus' fate whilst self-reflection as such can be maintained as a means to gain self-knowledge. Refuting the view that self-reflection is adverse to lived life and therefore at most a tool in learning processes which then has to be overcome, emphasises the healing potential of self-reflection and vindicates its status as an important method in psychotherapy.

It is hoped that the dialectical account provides a convincing framework for our everyday understanding of self-reflection which sees self-reflection as a valuable activity for gaining self-knowledge whilst being aware of the potential risk it bears thereby giving consideration to both, the Delphian calling and Narcissus' fate. Having drawn on Jaspers' work on self-reflection in developing this account, it is also hoped that this essay may inspire further and more scholarly research on this aspect of Jaspers' work.

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