

PS Self & Other in the Phenomenological Tradition

Reading Assignment 1

Task C

A key argument stated in the first chapter of Zahavi's book is the notion that there is a strong mismatch between the view of the 'self' by philosophers compared to empirical sciences. Furthermore it becomes less clear how selfhood is defined by psychology when looking at recent (1999-2005) publications on autism research, often containing conflicting assertions. It is then implied that this confusion is due to a lack of understanding of the self, or rather a lack of a clear definition (p.7).

While I agree with the importance of a proper definition of the self for both philosophers and empirical scientists, I reject this very definition would be of assistance when looking at the given example of autism research - it might be helpful in other areas of empirical research. To me it does not seem as though these issues arise due to a lack of understanding of the self, but much rather because the term 'autism' includes a range of conditions, exhibiting varying if not conflicting symptoms. Zahavi indirectly quotes Frith, stating that people with autism are both able to only judge their inner states by their actions while being able to report on their inner feelings and experience in great detail. To me, the implied conflict between these statements is unclear, and I disagree that a proper understanding of the self would be of any help in autism research.

Concluding that some might be able to report on feelings and experience can be done purely on an empirical basis. How feelings and experience stand in relation to the concept of the 'self' is an interesting and important question, though answering it might not be a requirement for some research.