A PRAGMATIST PERSPECTIVE ON SELF-STATE KNOWLEDGE IN THE THERAPY CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: Knowledge of our self-states seems to be characterized by two features: first-person authority – first-person statements about internal experience by someone can be used as grounds for making third-person claims about his/her self-state – and non-inferentiality – we are not supposed to give reasons for justifying how we know that we are feeling e.g. sad, angry, happy. These features have been often accounted for by hypotesizing the existence of a faculty called introspection. In this paper we aim to develop an alternative approach that overcomes introspectionism and at the same time accounts for the two features of self-state knowledge outlined above. After a critical discussion of the introspectionist standpoint, we discuss the anti-introspectionist approaches of Peirce and Mead. In the attempt to corroborate Peirce's and Mead's views with empirical observations, we examine self-state knowledge in the specific setting of psychoterapy. We will propose that - in the context of psychotherapy - a third feature of self-knowledge should be considered, which we wish to term incompleteness. Incompleteness entails that the expression of self-states calls into question the active contribution of the interlocutor, who in turn helps the subject making meaning of the client's internal state. In the conclusion, we will discuss how the nature of first person authority and non-inferentiality should be reassessed when we consider the feature of incompleteness.

When we think about how we come to know our present, 'internal' self-states – our moment to moment emerging needs, intentions, emotions, and so on – we may realize that this knowledge differs markedly from our knowledge of the external world. Knowledge of our self-states is characterized by two apparently special features. First, it demonstrates what philosophers often call "first-person authority". Although the idea of first-person authority can be understood in several ways (according to Rowlands, 2003, for instance, it can at be alternately interpreted as infallibility, incorrigibility, or self-intimacy), it generally means that first-person statements about internal experience can be used as grounds for making third-person claims about someone else. In other words, it is commonly believed that - unless one thinks that I am lying or severely deluded - my claim that I am e.g., in pain must be accepted as a reason to believe that I am (Wright 2000). Secondly, our claims about our own self-states are typically *non-inferential*. The demand that we produce reasons for saying that we are e.g., feeling angry or lonely ("how can you tell that you are feeling angry/lonely?") generally reveals a deep misunderstanding of fundamental socio-linguistic and interpersonal norms.

Philosophers have attempted to solve the so-called self-knowledge problem – that is, how can self-knowledge be at the same time authoritative and non-inferential (see Gertler 2015 for a review). This is no minor task. In fact, in most domains in which we regard a statement as epistemically authoritative, it is because we believe that the utterer has sufficient grounds to state it. To explain first-person authority and non-inferentiality in the context of self-knowledge, many philosophical theories have then hypothesized a faculty – i.e. *introspection* - that would give subjects privileged and non-inferential access to their self-states. Theories endorsing some version of introspectionism have occupied a central position in both modern and contemporary philosophy – from Descartes, to Locke, up until Russell. Even today, the introspectionist view remains essential to most paradigms of research in cognitive, clinical, and developmental psychology.

In accordance with pragmatist thinkers such as C.S. Peirce and G.H. Mead, we regard introspectionism as highly problematic. In this paper we attempt to make a case for alternative approaches that overcome introspectionism and at the same time account for the two features of self-state knowledge outlined above. After having illustrated a simplified version of the introspectionist standpoint and of the main objections against it, we discuss the anti-introspectionist approaches of Peirce and Mead. Next, in the attempt to corroborate Peirce's and Mead's views with empirical observations, we examine a context in which self-knowledge is routinely produced, discussed, and elaborated upon: the office of the psychotherapist.

We will then propose that - in the context of psychotherapy - a third feature of self-knowledge should be considered, which we wish to term *incompleteness.* When we observe how therapists and clients discuss the client's self-states, we realize that the expression of self-states by the client almost necessarily elicits an attuned response from the therapist. In response to the clients' disclosures, the therapist offers recast, redefinition, and elaboration. In other words, the expression of self-states calls into question the active contribution of the interlocutor, who in turn helps the subject making meaning of the client's internal state. Without such therapist contribution, the client's disclosures are truncated and fail to achieve their full communicative function. In the conclusion, we will discuss how first person authority and non-inferentiality can be seen in a different light when we add to them the feature of incompleteness.

Our hypotheses in this paper do not address self-knowledge in general, but a specific subdomain of self-knowledge that we term "self-state knowledge." Thus, before we proceed further, some distinctions are in order. To begin with, we must observe that first person authority and non-inferentiality are only features of the type of self-knowledge that Crispin Wright has called "phenomenal self-knowledge" (e.g., *I have a headache*, *I feel irritated*, *my vision is blurred*), and not of self-knowledge overall. In fact, the term self-knowledge is also used to describe knowledge about one's beliefs, attitudes, and character traits, which are at least in part known through a process of self-interpretation (Wright 2000). In addition, in this paper we want to focus on phenomenal *self-state* knowledge (or, more simply, self-state knowledge), because it is self-states what therapists and clients focus upon in psychotherapy. Self-state knowledge refers to claims made about the self as a whole, and it can be considered as a subdomain of phenomenal knowledge. As we will attempt to show, the reciprocal meaning-making process that highlights in our view the incompleteness of self-states is quite peculiar to this type of self-knowledge, while it is much less evident in the communication of e.g., sensations. Given that phenomenal knowledge and self-state knowledge are seldom distinguished - if at all – in the philosophical literature about self-knowledge, in the following we will use the term "self-state knowledge" in an effort to maximize clarity and streamline our presentation.

1. A common sense account of self-knowledge and its conceptual problems: the Introspectionist Theory of Self-state knowledge

Perhaps the most well-known theory that attempts to explain why self-state knowledge is at the same time authoritative and non-inferential is a theory that we will call in the remainder of this paper 'Introspectionist Theory of Self-state knowledge'. This theory is attractive and almost commonsensical. The general attitude that this theory articulates towards understanding others and ourselves seems so evident that most of us take it for granted by the time we are seven or eight years old (Botterill and Carruthers 1999). The idea behind the theory is that we - as humans - possess a faculty called introspection, which almost always help us arrive at a correct and direct 'perception' of what we are 'feeling inside'.

Different versions of the Introspectionist Theory of Self-state knowledge (from now on: ITSK) have been independently advanced by philosophers as different as Descartes (1641/1984), Locke (1689/1975), and Russell (1917). On this view, thanks to the faculty of introspection, we have an immediate and privileged access to the contents of our own minds. At the same time, according to this same view, it is impossible to know directly the thoughts and feelings of anyone other than ourselves. Minds are isolated. We are, as it turns out, imprisoned within the sphere of our own subjectivity (Colapietro 1989, 100-1)[1].

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[1] In his seminal work *Peirce's Approach to the Self (1989)* Colapietro labels this standpoint as "subjectivism". His definition of subjectivism is fully consistent with the here proposed definition of introspectivism.

The ITSK is a natural and appealing view, and it may appear to many as obviously correct. Yet, when examined, it runs into serious objections. Namely, as James (1884) maintained, self-knowledge requires more than just an individual "looking" at her own self-state; one has to properly conceptualize and label the self-state that she is experiencing. The most difficult hurdle for the ITSK is to explain how this conceptualization occurs. In particular, the difficulty is to explain how awareness of a self-state can be direct and immediate, and at the same time solid from an epistemic point of view. We are left with the issue of determining how introspection ensures that the representation of the self-state matches the self-state itself.

Further, the ITSK can hardly be transformed into a parsimonious scientific theory. In order the explain authority and groundlessness, this theory hypothesizes an invisible and indeed difficult to pin down faculty that warrants direct access to subjective intentional and emotional self-states; it also hypothesizes that such capacity to access intentional and emotional self-states develops equally in all humans, regardless of any difference that occurs during development (Shoemaker 1994).

It is therefore somewhat surprising that we find the ITSK at the roots of most current psychological theories of subjectivity. This is especially the case of theories that study the emergence of self-experiences in the context of early social development (a field of study commonly referred to as "infant research", Beebe and Lachmann 1998). Based on the micro-analytic observation of early mother-infant interaction, a striking majority of the authors in this field rightly emphasize intersubjectivity as primary in development (Beebe and Lachmann 2002). In order to explain the emergence of intersubjectivity, most infant researchers also assume that infants are provided with an originary drive to share their internal states with other human beings, chiefly with their caregivers (*primary intersubjectivity,* Akhtar and Tomasello 1998). Finally – and this is the crucial point - these authors agree that primary intersubjectivity must be based on an innate capacity to attribute mental states to oneself (see e.g., Trevarthen and Aitken 2001).

For instance, Meltzoff and his colleagues (Meltzoff & Gopnik 1993; Meltzoff & Moore 1977; Meltzoff & Moore 1998) propose a specific innate mechanism that underlies intersubjective attributions of intentional and feeling states during early imitative interaction. In their "active intermodal mapping model", the affective intentional behavioral acts of the other are mapped onto a supramodal body scheme, that allows the infant to recognize the other person as "just like me". Similarly, Stern (1985) claims that mental states are accessible to introspection basically from the start, and that self-knowledge arises independently from interaction with others. As a last example, Tronick, & Gianino (1987) maintain that, from the beginning, there must be a set of differentiated mental states that are immediately known by the infant and can therefore be expressed by the infant and regulated by the caregiver.

Even some of the fiercest critics of the primary intersubjectivity hypothesis, such as for example Peter Fonagy, Gyorgy Gergely, and Philippe Rochat, tend to endorse the view that an infant has an immediate knowledge of their own self-state, however implicit and embryonal. For example, Fonagy and Gergely disagree that "from the beginning of life the infant is aware of a relatively rich set of differentiated mental states of the self" (Fonagy, Gergely, Target 2007, 292). Yet these authors assume that, during parent-infant regulatory interactions, the infant is exposed to an explicit, analyzable form of what the infant feels 'privately' at an implicit level (Rochat, 1995, 2009). Thus, these authors theoretical position does not entail the thesis according to which the child initially lacks any awareness of her internal states. Rather, the infant may lack the capacity to label the self-states, not to be aware of them altogether. According to these authors, infants may have a certain awareness of the stimuli belonging to "the groups of internal state cues that are indicative of categorical emotions" (Gergely 2007, 111), even if only as a part of a Jamesian "blooming, buzzing confusion" of internal states (James 1890, 442**)**

As discussed above, claiming a central role for introspection in self-state knowledge seems to bring up thorny philosophical issues. These issues are not less pressing for psychology and other social sciences than they are for philosophy of mind. However, dismissing the introspective dimension altogether may incur in the danger of accounting for our subjective life only very incompletely. In the remainder of this paper, we will discuss how two classical pragmatist authors such as Charles Sanders Peirce and George Herbert Mead – by means of a certain kind of externalism - provide a viable way out from this dilemma.

2a. Charles Sanders Peirce on self-state knowledge

Peirce's rejection of introspectionism is central in the continuing development of his philosophy. Beginning with his early anti-Cartesian essays of the 1868-1869, Peirce always rejected the idea that individuals possess a special faculty through which they arrive at a privileged knowledge of their internal experience. Instead*,* Peirce proposes that we come to know our internal experience by means of a semiotic and social process. Like any other kind of thinking, self-knowledge is made up of signs. The ubiquity of signs entails that our knowledge of internal states is achieved through a semiotic process, whose outcomes are in principle fallible.

In *Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man* (1868)*,* Peirce distinguishes two ways in which we can arrive at a privileged knowledge of our self-states. In Peirce's view, we could hypothesize that we obtain privileged knowledge of our self-states by acquiring "inferential knowledge of the internal world not derived from external observation" (CP 5.244). Alternately, we may obtain privileged knowledge about our self-states by means of a form of non-inferential knowledge, or 'intuitive self-consciousness'[2]. Peirce believes that both options lead to conceptual problems.

Peirce denies that there may be non-inferential knowledge of any sort that is based on 'internal' facts. This knowledge is what Peirce views as proper 'introspection': "by introspection, I mean a direct perception of the internal world, but not necessarily a perception of it *as* internal" (CP 5.244). Peirce offers the example of emotions. Emotions arise apparently as something that 'refers' to the mind, and they seem to offer a comprehensive knowledge of mental processes that do not require any reference to the external world. One could think that, if an individual 'looks through' his or her anger, he or she must inquiry into a mental property, without any interest in what is going on in the external world and in the minds of the others.

However, such purely internal self-reference is only apparent. Any emotion relies on a predicate about an external object. When we are angry, for instance, we make (at least implicitly) a claim that the external world is not meeting our needs. Anger, or any other emotion, would not be possible without reference to external objects. Peirce writes: "any emotion is a predication concerning some object, and the chief difference between this and an objective intellectual judgment is that while the latter is relative to human nature or to mind in general, the former is relative to the particular circumstances and disposition of a particular man at a particular time" (CP 5.247).

Peirce also considers whether there may exist a faculty that is responsible for self-knowledge and is conceived as an 'intuitive consciousness of oneself.' Peirce defines intuition as "a cognition not determined by a previous cognition of the same object, and therefore so determined by something out of the consciousness", which is something analogous to a "premise not itself a conclusion" (CP 5.213). Intuitive immediate knowledge is then understood as the opposite of inferential and "discursive cognition", as already pointed out by the medieval philosopher Scotus, and in accordance with Kant's definition of the term. Knowing by intuition requires an immediate and direct relation between the subject and her object of knowledge, without the mediation of previous cognitions and signs. Intuitive self-consciousness is thus an immediate and non-discursive knowledge of our personal selves.

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[2] In order to make our exposition as clear as possible, we reverse here the order in which Peirce discusses these two forms of self-state knowledge.

The conceptual possibility of intuitive self-consciousness is first challenged by Peirce by referring to the observation of children. According to Peirce, "there is no known self-consciousness to be accounted for in extremely young children" (CP 5.227).[3] Consequently, self-consciousness must be the outcome of a developmental process. According to Peirce, a crucial role in this process is played by the "testimony" of the others. As soon as the child begins to produce vocal sounds, he or she starts learning how important are the opinions and the responses of the others (CP 5.233).

Later in his paper, Peirce advances an indirect, but possibly stronger, criticism against the possibility of intuitive self-consciousness. If we focus on external facts, Peirce argues, we notice that "the only cases of thought which we can find are thought in signs" (CP 5.251). In theory, things may be different as far as 'internal' facts are concerned; however, as we discussed above, in Peirce's view any knowledge of the internal world is mediated by knowledge of external facts. There is no thought and no knowledge without signs, and thus there can be no intuitive self-consciousness.

> From the proposition that every thought is a sign, it follows that every thought must address itself to some other, must determine some other, since that is the essence of a sign. This, after all, is but another form of the familiar axiom, that in intuition, i.e., in the immediate present, there is no thought, or, that all which is reflected upon has past. *Hinc loquor inde est.* That, since any thought, there must have been a thought, has its analogue in the fact that, since any past time, there must have been an infinite series of times. To say, therefore, that thought cannot happen in an instant, but requires a time, is but another way of saying that every thought must be interpreted in another, or that all thought is in signs. (CP 5.253)

In his later works, Peirce strongly refuses again to view any sort of introspection or intuitive self-consciousness as a special type of knowledge. Since knowledge is always expressed in signs, self-state knowledge must be mediated at a social level. Nothing akin to pure interiority can exist - an individual cannot 'direct its gaze towards her internal states'. Interiority is always made up of signs, communication, and sociality. Communication is the process through which the allegedly private self-states become the object of common attention and consideration. According to Peirce, the self is not a thing, or a property of an individual entity. Rather, the self is a sign, constantly reshaped by ongoing semiotic processes (Colapietro1989, 104). To "share our internal feelings" is thus not simply a metaphor. When one shares his disappointment with a sympathetic friend, the allegedly pure and isolated individualities merge together into a common field:

> But are we shut up in a box of flesh and blood? When I communicate my thought and my sentiments to a friend with whom I am in full sympathy, so that my feelings pass into him and I am conscious of what he feels, do not I live in his brain as well as in my own – most literally? True, my animal life is not there; but my soul, my feeling, thought, attention are. If this be not so, a man is not a word, it is true, but is something much poorer. There is a miserable material(istic) and barbarian notion according to which a man cannot be in two places at once; as though he were a *thing!* (CP 7.591).

It is important to highlight that such emphasis on the social dimensions of self-states does not lead Peirce to downplay the significance of internal experience altogether, or to endorse a sort of behaviorism *ante litteram*. Despite what Peirce's writings may sometimes seem to convey[4], some of the most prominent scholars of Peirce's anti-psychologism (Calcaterra 2006, Colapietro 2003) have shown that Peirce never dismisses internal experience as an epiphenomenon of external processes. Rather, he acknowledges that the inner aspect of sensations and emotions refers to the "constitution of the mind" (CP 5.291). At the same time, every time that I say: “I am sad”, or “I am angry”, the expressions of my self-states become “interconnected with the social cognitive and value-related criteria shaping the “external” frame of individual life" (Calcaterra 2006, 38).

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[3] Peirce does not ground this statements on actual empirical data, unavailable at his time. He briefly refers to Kant's remark about the late use of the word "I" by children as something suggesting the existence of "an imperfect self-consciousness in them" (CP 5.227).

[4] See for example when Peirce writes: "I have long ago come to be guided by this maxim: that as long as it is practically certain that we cannot directly, nor with

Every thought is a sign, and nothing can be known by means of intuition. We should not view our ‘cognitive’ relation to ourselves as immediate or transparent. Our self-knowledge is always mediated by signs, and thus inherently subject to error and ignorance. Self-knowledge is no exception to Peirce’s fallibilism. It is only because we incur in countless misunderstandings in our daily interaction with others and with the external world that we come to single out self-consciousness. The experience of error pushes us to infer the existence of the self as the subject of such error and ignorance.

2b. Mead and self-state knowledge

George Herbert Mead’s approach to self-knowledge is fully consistent with Peirce’s rejection of introspectionism. Like Peirce, Mead refuses to admit introspective knowledge as a privileged method to attain self-of knowledge. Rather, he maintains that self-knowledge is achieved through a social and communicative process. Self-states are expressed and acknowledged through an inner conversation, grounded on the internalization of the communicative interactions with the others.

Mead’s theory of self-state knowledge must be understood into the general framework of his methodological externalism. Mead turns introspectionism upside-down. The object of study of psychology is not subjective experience in its alleged immediacy. Rather, Mead proposes to inquire into the social conditions that make the existence of subjective experience possible:

> The point of approach which I wish to suggest is that of dealing with experience from the standpoint of society, at least from the standpoint of communication as essential to the social order. Social psychology, on this view, presupposes an approach to experience from the standpoint of the individual, but undertakes to determine in particular that which belongs to this experience because the individual himself belongs to a social structure, a social order (Mead 1934, 1)

According to Mead, the focus of psychology is conduct, rather than introspection. Apparently, such premises seem to lead Mead to endorse a behaviorist standpoint, according to which there exists nothing but external behavior, and there are no *strictu sensu* subjective experiences. However, such view of Mead’s approach to psychology as akin to behaviorism has been strongly criticized during the last decades, chiefly by Hans Joas in his fundamental 1985 monography. Despite Mead himself sometimes employs the phrasing label “ behaviorism” when referring to his own theory, the differences between his approach and Watson’s behaviorism are tremendous.[5] These differences do not lean only on the “social” character of Mead's alleged behaviorism. Rather, they are grounded on Mead's staunch refusal of eliminativism. Mead does not deny that talking about subjective experience is meaningful. He does believe, however, that subjective experience is a

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much accuracy even indirectly, observe what passes in the consciousness of any other person, while it is far from certain that we can do so (and accurately record what [we] can even links at best but very glibberly) even in the case of what should through our own mind, it is much safer to define all mental characters as far as possible in terms of their outward manifestations” (EP2, 465). Some further quotes, collected by de Waal (2013), seem to support an eliminativist interpretation of Peirce's approach to the self. However, equally convincing arguments and evidences whixh point to the opposite direction can be found in Colapietro (1989).

[5] On Mead’s behaviorism, see Joas (1985), Cook (1993), Baldwin (1981).

phase of a wider process. He thinks that there is a subjective side of experience that is provided with his specific qualities, one of which is accessibility:

> There are certain very genuine experiences which belong to physical objects and yet which are accessible only to the individual himself, notably, a toothache. There is an aching tooth, no question about it; and yet, thought others can see the tooth and the dentist can tap it, it aches only in whose head it is located, and much as he would like to he cannot transfer that ache to somebody else. (Mead 1936, 399).

Subjective experiences involve a sort of privileged access of the individual to her subjective experiences. Such a privilege does not entail neither a flawless epistemological relation between the subject and her experiences, nor an ontological distinction between world and consciousness. My experience of pain is the subjective side of an experience which is involving something which exists in a public way – e.g. my tooth. For instance, “feeling home” involves the subjective feeling of living in a material house made up of bricks. A landscape involves some sensations, to which I may have a sort of privileged access. But these feelings can be shared, as long as my communicative skills allow for such expression. To sum up, Mead believes that the subjective side of experience is a phase of a broader social act, involving a concrete relation with ourselves, with the world, and with the external environment. Rather than refusing to warrant epistemological legitimacy to subjective experience, Mead's pragmatic intersubjectivity (Joas 1985) focuses on the social and communicative conditions of the emergence of such an experience.

While Mead conceives subjective experience as the subjective side of a wider social act, he does not believe that such experiences represent a sufficient condition for the development of the self - Mead believes that subjective experiences should not be seen as identical to self-states.[6] In *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934) he articulates this point by distinguishing between subjective experiences and reflexive experiences. Subjective experiences such as bodily feelings are the object of privileged access by the individual, which so to speak delimits the field of subjective experience. Subjective experiences do not coincide, however, with reflexive experiences:

> Our bodies are parts of our environment; and it is possible for the individual to experience and be conscious of his body, and of bodily sensations, without being conscious or aware of himself— without, in other words, taking the attitude of the other toward himself. (...) Until the rise of his self-consciousness in the process of social experience, the individual experiences his body—its feelings and sensations—merely as an immediate part of his environment, not as his own, not in terms of self-consciousness. The self and self-consciousness have first to arise, and then these experiences can be identified peculiarly with the self, or appropriated by the self; to enter, so to speak, into this heritage of experience, the self has first to develop within the *social process in which this heritage is involved.*(Mead 1934, 171)

The perception of subjective experiences as self-experiences is not automatic. Self-experiences presuppose the capacity of the self of perceiving itself as an object, and therefore of engaging a reflective relationship with itself: "Neither a colic nor a stubbed toe can give birth to reflection, nor do pleasures or pains, emotions or moods, constitute inner psychical contents, inevitably referred to a self, thus forming an inner world within which autochthonous thought can spring up" (Mead 1934, 357). Subjective experience becomes reflexive only if there is a self. But what condition should we presuppose in order to account for the existence of the self?

According to Mead, the condition of existence of subjective self-conscious experiences must be traced back to a specific trait of human conduct. Humans are able to prompt in themselves the same response that they prompt in other individuals. By means of this process, which Mead calls "taking the attitude of the other", individuals anticipate in their own experience the possible responses of the other. Taking the attitude of the other means internalizing the responses of the others to own our gesture. Thanks to this internalization, the individual can talk to herself in the same way as she talks to the other. Such an internal conversation constitutes what Mead calls the self, that is, self-consciousness. I am a self, as long as I can reflect upon myself through an inner conversation. Such an inner conversation is neither an innate pre-wired capacity, nor a transparent intuition of myself. Rather, it is the outcome of the active internalization of the conversations of gestures that I had with the others. Differently from other kinds of subjective experiences, self-conscious subjective experiences presuppose the existence of a very specific kind of social process:

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[6] For a detailed discussion of this distinction see Baggio (2015).

> the existence of private or "subjective" contents of experience does not alter the fact that self-consciousness involves the individual's becoming an object to himself by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within an organized setting of social relationships, and that unless the individual had thus become an object to himself he would not be self-conscious or have a self at all. Apart from his social interactions with other individuals, he would not relate the private or "subjective" contents of his experience to himself, and he could not become aware of himself as such, that is, as an individual, a person, merely by means or in terms of these contents of his experience; for in order to become aware of himself as such he must, to repeat, become an object to himself, or enter his own experience as an object, and only by social means—only by taking the attitudes of others toward himself—is he able to become an object to himself. (Mead 1934, 226)[7]

The social condition of the development of the kind of specific self-experiences should then be identified with social communication. Our specific and peculiar experience of ourselves is continuously shaped by our communicative intersubjective interactions with others. Therefore, the natural social conditions should not be understood in a static way. Mead does not see the self as the warehouse of past internalized communicative interactions. He rather believes that, to a certain extent, such transformative process is ongoing and never complete once and for all: "The important character of social organization of conduct or behavior through instincts is not that one form in a social group does what others do, but that the conduct of one form is a stimulus to another to a certain act, and that this act again becomes a stimulus at first to a certain reaction, and so on in ceaseless interaction" (Mead 1909, 101).

Mead clearly acknowledges both the communicative conditions and the communicative nature of subjective experience. It is not just that social communication allows for the emergence of the peculiar subjective experiences that take place within the self. Rather, internal reflexive experiences are inherently communicative as they are "made of" inner speech. Reflexive experiences are thus social experiences, and yet they may become "at any moment personal" (Mead 1913, 146).

To sum up, Peirce's and Mead's criticism of introspectionism is grounded on the key role of communication. By postulating the primacy of communicative and semiotic processes, they both overcome the paradoxes involved in an approach to self-knowledge based on introspection as a special faculty. The legitimacy and peculiarity of subjective experience does not entail a solipsistic closure of the individual. The capacity of sharing self-states is fully accountable, as long as communicative processes are conceived as permeating our relation with ourselves.

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[7] According to Madzia (2015) Mead's argument presupposes the existence of an originary form of self-awareness. This criticism is consistently based on the ambiguity of Mead's concept of "self-stimulation". The discussion of this important interpretative issue falls beyond the scope of this paper. For a wider criticism of the semiotic approaches to the self, see also Madzia (2015a).

3. Peirce's and Mead's anti-introspectionism at the test of observation: the case of self-state communication in psychotherapy

Many philosophical analyses of self-state knowledge, from Descartes to Searle (1983) have been intensively focused on the analysis of single utterances and how they enable self-expression. In the following paragraphs, we will attempt to gain a different vantage point by reinstating the expression of self-states in their natural context: the dialogue. In particular, we propose to analyze self-expression in the context of psychotherapy, a revealing communicative context in relation to our object of study. Self-states are expressed and attuned to in many everyday situations; yet in psychotherapy, regardless of the therapeutic modality, clients and therapists focus upon them more intensely and deliberately. We thus believe that a close examination of conversation in psychotherapy can illuminate aspects of ordinary language that may otherwise rest hidden or only incompletely understood. As we hope to convince the reader, our analysis of self-state communication in the context of psychotherapy will show that the ITSK is to be regarded as unsatisfactory, and that we should endorse the pragmatist views that self-knowledge is to be understood in the communicative and pragmatic dimension of interaction.

The following excerpt is taken from a session with a client named Laura, 28 years old, in treatment for longstanding anxiety and to address ongoing relational problems. The excerpt comes from the beginning of the eight session of treatment, and it starts in a fairly typical way:

> (1) **Therapist**: Hello. How are you doing today?
> (2) **Laura**: I'm…I don't know whether to laugh or cry. I'm…I had a crazy fight with my brother yesterday. *I'm actually quite upset*.

The ITSK seems to account fairly well for the previous excerpt. Laura is asked about her present self-state ("how are you today?"); she is the 'subject of the experience', and therefore she is the 'most informed person to ask'. In keeping with the ITSK, Laura provides with her statement an *authoritative* and *non-inferential* account of her present self-state. In fact, consider the following utterances as possible replies to Laura's self-state expression:

> (a) It's not true that you are upset.
> (b) How can you tell that you are upset?

These sentences would constitute severe violations of conversational expectations. By saying (a), the therapist violates the assumption of authority, while by saying (b) the therapist violates the assumption of non-inferentiality.

Well and good. There are, however, other statements that in this context would violate fundamental linguistic expectations without violating the assumptions of authority and non-inferentiality. Consider if, for example, the therapist offered one of the following utterances in response to Laura saying "I'm quite upset":

> (c) OK, but I don't care.
> (d) Yes you are upset.
> (e) Oh dear, what happened?
> (f) I can hear it from the sound of your voice. Perhaps you are frustrated too?

The reader will easily admit, it seems to us, that (c) and (d) constitute violations of some fundamental conversational rule, while we will regard (e) and (f) as both correct. Why? Neither (c) nor (d) challenges the truth of the client's claim, nor the grounds on which the client's discloses that she feels upset. Something else is missing. It seems to us that, contrarily from (e) and (f), (c) and (d) do not make any attempt to advance the process by which the client's self-state is known. The statement (c) betrays a disinterest in the meaning-making process; the statement (d) simply fails to add any content to the client's self-expression.

We are thus encouraged to postulate a third characteristic of self-state knowledge, in addition to authority and non-inferentiality: *incompleteness*. As in the example above, the expression of self-states calls for the active contribution of the other speaker. Self-state expression should thus be regarded, in and of itself, as inevitably partial. From the analysis of psychotherapy transcripts (Talia, Miller-Bottome, & Daniel 2015) it appears that there are two ways in which an interlocutor can add content to the expressions of a subject's self-state. First, an interlocutor can make a guess about the client's present self-state, either in the form of a conjecture, or in the form of a closed question. For example – as in (f) - the therapist hypothesizes Laura's self-state (i.e. frustration) *before* she even does so. Alternately, the therapist may empathically validate the expression of the client's self-state. Empathic validation consists in the expression of agreement with the subject's definition of her present self-state by validating the reasons why such self-state is experienced at this time. For example, the therapist may affirm the client's emotional reaction by agreeing on the client's assessment of the situation that caused it; or the therapist may support the client's agency by saying that having to take another course of action 'would not be fair'.

In this sense, the contribution of the other is not merely a contingent response that occurs after the expression of self-states. It is, in psychotherapy, the necessary condition for the communication of self-states to be meaningful in first place. The client and the therapist contribute to determining the client's present self-states, until some kind of reciprocal agreement is achieved, at least temporarily. Completeness is always relative to a given communication process involving some speakers in relation to a specific object – i.e. the self-states of one of them. This contingently completed process is a potential source of new semiotic outcomes within a wider and, as Peirce claims, infinite semiosis.[8]

Conclusion

The working hypothesis sketched here agrees with the pragmatist twofold stance about self-state knowledge: asserting the primacy of communicative social processes, while conceiving self-states as more than just epiphenomena. We tried to develop such stance by focusing on the actual communication of self-states, and we outlined three characters of such communication: authority, non-inferentiality, and incompleteness. The subtle dialectic between the legitimacy of subjective reflexive experience and the crucial role played by social communication is a fruitful heritage of pragmatist thought, and especially of Peirce's and Mead's theories. As both Peirce and Mead foresaw, social communicative processes are not simply external conditions of self-reflexive experience. Rather, they play a constitutive role in shaping the content and the nature of self-states in themselves.

This dialectic is at work in the three features of self-state communication that we have presented in this paper. Authority and non-inferentiality rest on the privileged epistemological relation of individuals with their internal world. Such epistemological privilege, however, should not be read within an introspectionist framework. In fact, authority and non-inferentiality coexist in our view with a third character, which we proposed to term "incompleteness". Incompleteness refers to the observation that the client and the therapist are both actively cooperating in a communicative process which aims to specify and determine the nature of the client's self-states. This process is reciprocal: on one side the client expresses her self-states without the need for grounding them on justification; on the other side the therapist contributes to making meaning of the client's self-state by agreeing, proposing additional or even alternative perspectives ("Are you sad? You actually look nervous…", etc.). The therapist does not merely recognize, imitate, and mirror the self-expressions of the client. Both client and therapist actively cooperate in determining the content of the client's self-states.

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[8] For an original Peircean understanding of the distinction between complete and incomplete, see Maddalena (2015). Following Maddalena's definition of complete and incomplete gestures, one could say that the constitutive incompleteness of the individual expression of self-states opens the path to a "complete" cooperative sharing of our self-states with the others. This only apparently paradoxical point has been fully developed in Santarelli (2017).

It is interesting to notice that, as we realize that self-state expression is inherently incomplete, we are increasingly led to interrogate the degree in which self-state expression can be authoritative or 'groundless' in first place. If self-state expression has always to be completed by a listener, at least in the context of psychotherapy, it is easy to see that we should rethink the concept of first-person authority in a more fallibilist direction. There is a sense in which only a subject of an experience may have the "first" and the "last" word on his experience. Yet, the capacity of the subject to speak about his experience in first place is enabled by a collaborative and interested interlocutor.

At present, it is not clear whether our considerations on self-state communication can be generalized outside psychotherapy. We routinely express our self-states with our significant others; and we attune to their self-states too. Yet, it may be that the character of incompleteness that we have pointed out in self-state communication is specific to psychotherapy. Psychotherapy creates a very special relationship between patient and therapist, one in which many conversational norms are temporarily suspended or subverted. It could also be argued that clients go to therapy precisely because they have trouble in expressing and symbolizing their internal states, and thus their avowals and expressions are "more" incomplete.

A viable reply to this criticism is based on an observation that will be familiar to most clinicians. The patient's openness towards the therapist's attunement that typifies self-state communication in therapy is more evident in well-functioning patients than in the more impaired ones. It is the patient with a higher level of functioning the one who invites feedback, or who expresses her experience in a way that feedback and mirroring are possible in first place. Such character of incompleteness is, on the contrary, virtually absent in the communication of patients with severe personality disorders or psychosis. These patients are often impermeable to the attempts of the clinician to redefine their experience, and they stick to rigid and almost petrified views of who they are (see e.g., Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, Target, 2002). These considerations seem to suggest that incompleteness is a feature of functional rather than dysfunctional communication; or at least, if incompleteness turned out to be a special feature of self-state communication in therapy, that would not likely be a consequence of the level of patient's impairment. Further work is needed to ground our observations into a broader context and to establish how general or logically primitive incompleteness is in self-state communication.[9]

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[9] The paper is the outcome of a cooperative work between the two authors. Section I and III could be more strictly attributed to AT; part II to MS.

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