

Who or what is the Self?

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KING LEAR

- Does any here know me? Why, this is not Lear:
- Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes? Either his notion weakens, or his discernings Are lethargied – Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so!
- Who is it that can tell me who I am?
- (*King Lear* (2005): 1.4.185-188)
- De Agostini Picture Library/Getty Images



Who am I?

- There is a 'Self' asking the question
- Doubling or splitting of the self.
- Certainty: However much I doubt, I cannot doubt that I am doubting.





Who is asking the questions

- When child asks who or what am I he does not ask from his desire to know his own surname, age, sex or position in his form. He knows all his ordinary personalia. He feels there is something else in the background for which his "I" stands, a something which has still to be described when all his ordinary personalia have been listed. He also feels very vaguely that whatever it is that this "I" stands for it is something very important and quite unique., unique in the sense that neither it, nor anything like it belongs to anyone else. There could only be one of it. (Gilbert Ryle: Concept of the Mind)
- Self-portrait in the convex mirror - Parmigianino



Self is Elusive

- Pronouns like you, she or we feel quite unmystifying while I feels mystifying . And it feels mystifying anyhow in part, because the more the child tries to put his finger on what “I” stands for, the less does he succeed in doing so. He can catch only his coat-tail, it itself is always and obdurately a pace ahead of its coat-tails, like the shadow of one’s own head it does not wait to be jumped upon. And yet it is never very far ahead.... It is too near to be even within arm’s reach. (Gilbert Ryle The Concept of Mind)

Wittgenstein Tractatus



5.632 The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.

5.633 Where *in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be found?

You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But really you do *not* see the eye.

And nothing *in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye.

5.6331 For the form of the visual field is surely not like this



Eye/I

- And why, do you think, does the eye, though incapable of seeing itself in itself, yet see itself in the mirror?' (Gassendi: 'Objection Against the Meditations of Descartes' in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes II tr Elizabeth S Haldane and GRT Ross* Cambridge University Press 1967: 162-3)
- Original versus derivative attention. In the mirror you attend to yourself given in another way.

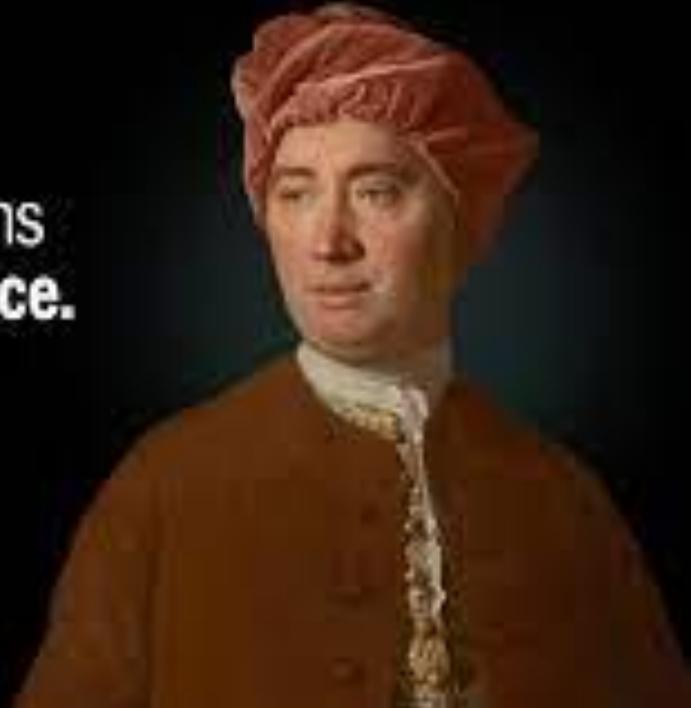


If it cannot be represented –
then it does not exist?

A wise man proportions
his **belief to the evidence.**

— *David Hume*

AZ QUOTES



- ‘when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.’ (Hume *Treatise of Human Nature* Book I Part IV Sec 6: 300 C.f. *ibid*: ‘Second Thoughts’ Appendix to first edition of third book pp. 675ff).
- ‘B1.4.6).



Pledge by
Non-owners

Non-Ownership Theory

‘We are acquainted only with the existence of our sensations, imaginations and thoughts. “Thinking is going on” is what one should say, just as one says “Lightening is occurring”. Saying “cogito” is too much, as soon as one translates it as “I am thinking”’. (Lichtenberg (1971): Sec76 [18]: 412.)

So while language and, indeed, custom impels us to refer to a self, it turns out to be nothing other than a ‘practical requirement’ (Lichtenberg (1971): Sec76 [18]: 412), a grammatical invention (e.g., Nietzsche), or a figment of our imagination (David Hume).

The truth is, as Friedrich Nietzsche notes, that ‘there is no “being” behind the doing, acting, becoming. “The doer” is merely made up and added into the action—the act is everything’ (Friedrich Nietzsche Genealogy of Morals Sec 13).



Self does not exist

- It may *seem* that there is a subject of experience that stands apart from experience and to whom we attribute experience, yet there is not *really* such a subject: the *seeming* points to an illusion.

The “I” is not an object of representations but does it need to be an object to be a self?

- It is ‘evident that I cannot know as an object that which I must presuppose in order to know any object’ (Kant CPR A402).
- the subject in its pure subjectivity ‘is only there insofar as I do not grasp or objectify it, and insofar as I grasp or objectify it, it is no more’ (Schelling (1859): SW I/4 357 fn 2).

What makes the self distinctive?

- It can only be known from the first person perspective
- It exists in an through the act of reflection and can never be an object of reflection.



Performative Understanding of Self

- Descartes: I think, therefore I am
- We should not understand *ego cogito, ergo sum*” as an inference (theoretically), but as a performance. ‘Hence the indubitability of this sentence,’ says Hintikka, ‘is not strictly speaking perceived by *means* of thinking (in the way the indubitability of a demonstrable truth may be said to be); rather, it is indubitable *because* and *in so far as* it is actively thought of [...] The indubitability of my own existence results from my thinking of it almost as the sound of music results from playing it or ... light in the sense of illumination (*lux*) results from the presence of a source of light (*lumen*)’ (Hintikka (1962: 122)).

- We can be certain that we are thinking in a way we cannot even be certain about our personal identity
- The self has no history? It is self-identical over time.
- But is it?

Are we always Conscious about ourselves as Selves?

- When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in contemplating a portrait, there is no I. There is consciousness of the street-car-having-to-be-overtaken, etc., and non-positional consciousness of consciousness. In fact, I am then plunged into the world of objects; it is they which constitute the unity of consciousness; it is they which present themselves with values, with attractive and repellent qualities—but me, I have disappeared; I have annihilated myself. There is no place for me on this level. And this is not a matter of chance due, to a momentary lapse of attention, but happens because of the very structure of consciousness.
- Jean-Paul Sartre, TE p.49



- *If I count the cigarettes that are in this cigarette case, I experience the unfolding of an objective property: there are twelve cigarettes. This property appears to my consciousness as a property existing in the world. I may very well have no positional consciousness of counting them. I do not 'know myself counting'. . . . However, while these cigarettes present themselves to me as being twelve cigarettes, I have a non-thetic consciousness of my activity of adding. If I am asked: 'what are you doing?' I will reply: 'I am counting', and this answer does not only track the instantaneous consciousness which I may reach by reflection, but also those that passed without being reflected, those that are forever unreflected in my immediate past. . . . There is a pre-reflective cogito which is the condition of the Cartesian Cogito. (Sartre (2003): 9*





Problem

If our sense of self is episodic can we still refer to a unitary self that is identical over time?

Possible Solution

- If it is understood as a "what," the answer must be no .
- If we understand it as a "Who" maybe we can!
- THE END

