

BOOK REVIEW

**A REVIEW OF PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF,
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The notion of self is one of the most elusive in contemporary philosophy. It is a concept with many layers and connotations and its analysis generates a vast amount of literature and a large number of disputes in philosophical, psychological as well as neuroscientific circles. What exactly is the self? What are its essential characteristics? Is it material? Is it identical to the body or could it move from one body to another? Is there anything like the self in the first place? Can we examine it by introspection? How do we reidentify selves in time? Is the self the bearer of agency and responsibility? Could I become someone else?

Boran Berčić has edited the collection *Perspectives on the Self* with the aim to shed light on some of the facets of the self. The collection, according to the editor, results from the activities of several philosophers at the Department of Philosophy in Rijeka and a conference on the self, which was held in Rijeka the spring of 2016.

There are 17 papers in the collection, 12 are authored by philosophers associated with the Department of Philosophy in Rijeka or other Croatian philosophy departments, and 5 by authors from UK, Serbia, Finland, Hungary and USA.

The collection is divided into 6 sections with an extensive introduction by the editor, who provides a brief overview of the claims and arguments made in each paper. The sections focus on the relationship between the self and the body, self-knowledge, the history of the concept of self, self as an agent, the very existence of self and general metaphysical and linguistic issues involved in the concept. There are two to four papers in each section.

The first section contains papers by Eric Olson, Miljana Milojević and Zdenka Brzović.

In his paper *The Central Dogma of Transhumanism* Olson argues against a claim frequently made by transhumanists, according to which it is possible to scan the synaptic matrix of the human brain and upload the information to a computer, thus guaranteeing the survival of the person.

Olson argues that this supposition leads directly to the *branching problem*, which is well-known from classical objections to the psychological continuity theory of human persistence. Also, he shows that the transhumanist claim makes unintelligible the difference between a person being uploaded to a computer and a new person indistinguishable from the original one being programmed in the computer. Olson then identifies a deeper problem with the transhumanist claim: people are animals and the process of scanning and uploading will simply not move an animal to a computer, that is, guarantee the survival of the animal. Finally, Olson assesses three alternative accounts of human identity – the pattern view, the constitution view and the temporal-parts view. He argues that the first one is inconsistent with the fact that we change, the second one does not actually deal with the above problems, and the last one does not give us what we want from survival.

Milojević holds a very different theory of human identity in her *Embodied and Extended Self*. Assuming functionalism about mental states, the psychological view of the self and the extended mind thesis, she argues that the self can actually be more extended than the body, even including objects external to the body, such as a notebook. First, she uses standard thought experiments to show that neither animalism, nor the soul theory is the correct account of human identity. Second, she considers arguments against the psychological theory and concludes that it has fewer ontological commitments and explains more of our intuitions. After that she defends a form of realizer functionalism, according to which mental states are the typical realizers of the functions identified with the mental states. However, she further argues that unlike in the brain theory, the realization base of the functions can include entities other than brain tissue and that the self can extend beyond the human brain and even the human body. This conclusion is reached by considering Andy Clark and David Chalmers' supposition that cognitive processes can be realized in non-neural realizers (the extended cognition view) and that some of these processes constitute narrative autobiographical memories, which, according to Milojević, track personal identity.

Brzović returns to the biological account of the self in her paper *The Immunological Self* and attempts to define an individual organism. She starts with several implausible definitions, such as ones based on functional integration or autonomy. The main part of the paper is spent over immunological definitions. Brzović critically assesses the self-nonsel theory, according to which an organism is everything that is tolerated by the immune system. She shows that there are counterexamples to this theory and that it cannot account for the phenomena of autoreactivity, immune tolerance and symbiosis. Brzović also considers other theories. The systemic theory of immunity is rejected as too vague to be useful. Polly Matzinger's danger theory lacks precision

in the definition of danger. And finally, the continuity theory by Thomas Pradeu embodies a problem common to all of the immunological theories: it actually assumes that we can already identify an organism to be able to delineate those factors that trigger an immune response.

The next part of the collection focuses on epistemological issues.

Nenad Mišćević ponders over the question whether self-knowledge has any value. In his *The Value of Self-Knowledge* he distinguishes between the direct knowledge of inner phenomenal states and the, mostly inferential, knowledge of one's causal powers, and assesses these from the perspective of instrumental value as well as intrinsic value. He believes that both the knowledge of phenomenal states and the knowledge of causal powers clearly have instrumental value. Insensitivity to pain and thirst or complete lack of knowledge of what one can cause and what one's reactions to external causes are is evidently inconsistent with the survival of such a deprived individual. But both types of knowledge also have intrinsic value. Drawing from John McDowell, Mišćević maintains that if we did not have epistemic access to our own mental states we would turn into zombies and stop being who we are. Knowledge of phenomenal states is thus constitutive of our selves. Knowledge of our causal powers is also intrinsically valuable, according to Mišćević, because such form of self-inquisitiveness is a virtue that contributes to the authentic self.

Luca Malatesti has contributed with a paper titled *The Self-Ascription of Conscious Experience*. As the title suggests he is interested in the process in which we ascribe conscious experiences to ourselves, and he takes as his model examples the experiences of color. He argues that a necessary condition for a thinker to be able to attribute conscious experience to herself is that she have the relevant concept, and having the concept is preconditioned by actually having the relevant experience. Malatesti thus rejects several theories in philosophy of mind, such as behaviorism, which are inconsistent with this supposition. Malatesti then analyzes what he calls the central transition, that is, the transition from having a certain experience to the knowledge that one is having that experience. He rejects the inner sense theory, because it relies on what he takes to be an implausible assumption that we have direct awareness of the self and the conscious experiences. He also questions the idea that the capacities that we employ in having conscious experience are the same as those that enable us to formulate self-ascriptions of conscious experience. Malatesti then formulates at least a necessary condition for the transition: the transition from judgments about how things appear to be to self-ascriptions of the relevant experiences requires the capacities that are involved in the mastery of observational concepts. Finally, he turns to the concept of self that is implied in such self-ascriptions. Although the concept seems to be implicitly present in each conscious experience, Malatesti argues that a richer notion is necessary. He sides with Alan

Millar and claims that the mastery of the concept of conscious experience involves the capacity to think about ourselves as entities that have sense organs and internal mental states that are determined by interactions with certain sorts of stimulation of these sense organs.

The next part of the collection maps certain historical views of the notion of self, offering papers on the accounts of the notion in logical positivism, Brentano, Buddhist Philosophy and Ancient Philosophy.

Boran Berčić in his *Logical Positivists on the Self* analyzes two broad questions: 1) What is the prominent logical positivists' opinion of Descartes' notion of *Cogito*? 2) What positive accounts of the self did they develop? First, Berčić offers various interpretations of *Cogito* and finds most plausible the interpretation according to which it is an inference from an attribute (thinking) to a substance (the thinker). Then he documents the key logical positivists' arguments rejecting the inference. He shows that Moritz Schlick considered it to be a mere stipulative definition, Rudolf Carnap dismissed it as a meaningless claim, because it cannot be formulated in classical logic which does not contain the predicate for existence, Weinberg considered the inference a tautology, and Alfred Ayer dismissed it as invalid, because, in his view, the presence of thinking does not necessarily imply the existence of the subject of this event. In the second half of the paper Berčić analyzes the theories of the self that the logical positivists offered. He shows that for Carnap it was a class of elementary experiences, for Ayer it was a logical construction out of sense-experiences and for Reichenbach an abstractum composed of concreta and illata. The logical positivists were thus reductionists about the self. In the final part Berčić shows how they dealt with a classical objection to reductionism according to which it is a circular theory.

In his *Brentano on Self-Consciousness*, Ljudevit Hanžek brings an overview of Franz Brentano's thoughts and arguments on the nature of consciousness and self-consciousness. Hanžek claims that Brentano's thoughts on self-consciousness were related to his ideas about introspection. Brentano maintained that introspection of our mental states is an impossible process, because it would require the division of the subject into an observer and the observed, which he believed to be impossible. However, there is a mechanism by which the subject can become acquainted with her own mental states. Brentano calls it inner consciousness and contrasts it with inner observation, that is, introspection. Inner consciousness is a process in which the subject is aware of an object and simultaneously also peripherally aware of the mental state of awareness of this object. Hanžek then shows how Brentano refuted the Regress Argument threatening his position, and lists several arguments that Brentano used to support his position. Finally, Hanžek questions an alternative interpretation of Brentano's position by Amie Thomasson and dismisses it as lacking support by textual evidence.

In the following paper, *The No-Self View in Buddhist Philosophy*, Goran Kardaš brings insight into the Buddhist perspective on the self, that is, more precisely, the idea that there is no self as we typically think. Kardaš begins by characterizing Buddha as what we would call today a conventionalist about language and empiricist and verificationist in epistemology. Then he shows how this philosophical background led Buddha to see through the illusion that language items and syntactical relations correspond to objectively existing entities and events. A special instance of this illusion is the belief that the expression “I” actually denotes an entity – my self. Next Kardaš walks the reader through the process of reduction and elimination of the concept of self in Buddhist thought. The paper concludes by a brief overview of later developments in Buddhist philosophy.

The last paper of this section focuses on the self in Ancient Philosophy, as the title suggests. The author Ana Gavran Miloš attempts to refute a line of thought in contemporary history of philosophy, according to which the Ancient Greeks did not have a concept of self equivalent to the modern, post-Cartesian notion of self predominant today. First, she characterizes the Cartesian notion of self as a self-conscious individual with a privileged access to her own mental states endowed with epistemic certainty about them. Next, she formulates a challenge according to which the Greeks did not have such a subjective-individualistic concept of self, because they discussed the notion of self under a wider problem of what it takes to be a human being objectively. Gavran Miloš then analyses the work of Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus to show that none of them considers the self, or the soul, in their terminology, to be such a subjective, self-conscious and epistemically privileged entity. However, the picture is different if we consider the purpose for which Ancient Greeks employed the concept of soul, namely for practical concerns in the pursuit of happiness. Here, the author claims, the notion of individuality finds its application, because the notion of eudaimonia is always a notion of individual eudaimonia, that is, one’s own happiness.

Part IV of the collection focuses on the notion of agency and its relation to the central concept of the book. It consists of papers by Matej Sušnik, Filip Čeč and Marko Jurjako.

In the paper *Ideal Self in Non-Ideal Circumstances*, Sušnik focuses on the complex relationship between reasons, motivation and justification of our actions. He adopts the Advice model of internalism about reasons in claiming that one’s reasons for action are dependent on the advice of one’s ideal self. A challenge to this view is that the ideal self will sometimes be a markedly different being, and, as a result, a normal agent will not be able to do what the ideal agent would advise her to do. Further, in such a case it seems a mystery, according to Sušnik, why we should seek advice from our ideal selves, rather than just anyone ideally placed, which would undermine one tenet of internalism.

In the end, Sušnik defends a solution developed by Williams, which does not depend on the concept of ideal self. Williams claims that an agent has a reason to do *x* only if there is a sound deliberative route from the agent's motivational set to the agent's doing *x*, regardless of the fact whether the agent is actually able to do *x*. Sušnik then applies this theory to several problematic cases to show its explanatory power.

Čeč in his paper *The Disappearing Agent* takes the reader to the debate surrounding the notion of free will. He defends a form of event causal libertarianism, according to which a free action is the product of indeterministic, agent involving mental events or states, which do not rely on any specific form of selfhood (in contrast to agent causal libertarianism, which presupposes the self as an ontologically irreducible entity that has the capacity to cause free choices). Čeč develops the notion of torn decision – a decision in which the agent has two equally justified options and decides on one of them without resolving the conflict – to demonstrate an objection to event causal libertarianism. According to the disappearing agent objection, if the torn decision is not resolved by the agent, but by an indeterministic event, then the presence of the agent is quite irrelevant in the decision-making process, the agent disappears. In the second half of the paper Čeč lists and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of several possible answers to the objection. He favors the response that the causal libertarian should acknowledge that something gets lost in the decision-making process and that there will be some residual arbitrariness, but that the agent will not disappear from the process, because the decision will still be attributable to her.

In *Agency and Reductionism about the Self*, Jurjako discusses the relevance of agency for personal identity. His aim is to show that agency based accounts of personal identity are not necessarily incompatible with classical psychological continuity accounts. Jurjako begins with a detailed exposition of the psychological theory of personal identity and then shows how the theory is committed to reductionism about personal identity, that is, the idea that personal identity is not a further fact over and above facts about bodies, brains and their functions. Further, he shows that reductionism entails the fact that sometimes questions about personal identity will have indeterminate answers. In part 4 Jurjako focuses on what's called the *Extreme Claim*, that is, the claim that if reductionism is correct, we have no reason to care about our own future, and presents Parfit's solution, according to which the preservation of personal identity is not necessary for survival as long as psychological continuity is preserved. In the next part Jurjako turns to agency accounts of personal identity, with an emphasis on Korsgaard's theory. He challenges the alleged incompatibility between Parfit's and Korsgaard's theories and shows that Parfit's theory has the resources to account for agency. In addition, he argues that the resulting theory can avoid the Extreme Claim that threatens reductionism.

Part V focuses on issues related to the existence of the self. In *On Never Been Born*, Marin Biondić analyzes value claims related to existence and non-existence, such as whether it is ever good to be brought into existence or whether not ever existing is preferable to existing at some time. Biondić employs the *Reference Argument*, according to which such claims only make sense if there is a referent of the subject of the value claim. If the claim does not refer, it is meaningless. As a result, it makes no sense to compare the value of existence versus non-existence for a person who never exists. Biondić further explores whether we could use an analogy of the comparative account of the badness of death to make value claims about prenatal existence and non-existence. He claims the analogical argument enables us to say that being brought into existence can be good or bad for an actual person, even if not being brought into existence could not possibly be bad *for her* (according to the Reference Argument). Biondić then discusses the arguments of two philosophers who challenge this reasoning. David Brenatar's general argument that it is never better to come into existence is found only partially successful and Palle Yourgrau's theory is rejected because it entails possibilism, which, according to Biondić, would be a high price to pay.

In the next paper in this section Iris Vidmar analyzes the notion of *fictional characters*. She sets out by exploring a puzzling feature of fictional characters: they do not exist, but we still treat them as real in a sense. Vidmar then discusses logical, metaphysical and semantic theories of the existence of fictional characters, more specifically the realist ones, according to which fictional characters are real entities of a sort, and argues that these theories ignore the fact that fictional characters are artistic creations. She prefers to analyze them from literary-aesthetics perspectives, according to which their identity is indeterminate, open to interpretations, imbued with properties we recognize as human as well as purely artistic qualities. The main body of the paper consists of the author's defense of a multi-layered account of the identity of fictional characters, according to which their identity consists of aspects related to the author's activities in creating them and those involved in readers' activities in responding to them. Along the way Vidmar discusses how fictional characters come into being and vanish, how they represent certain types and classes, and how their identity is relative to our interests.

The final part of the collection offers three papers on the metaphysics and philosophy of language of the self. In the first paper of this section, *Haecceity Today and with Duns Scotus: Property or Entity?*, Márta Ujvári compares the current notion of primitive thisness, that is, haecceity, with its original counterpart developed by Duns Scotus. Ujvári shows that today haecceity is considered to be a non-qualitative property whose function is to guarantee trans-world identity and possible world individuation in modal metaphysics.

Next, the author looks at the definitions of the concept of non-qualitative property and questions its identification with impure qualitative properties in the work of several authors. She also poses other challenges for the current concept: Can haecceities exist uninstantiated? Do they really guarantee trans-world identity? How do they connect to individual natures? Ujvári then presents an alternative understanding originating with Duns Scotus, who considered haecceity to be a principle of individuation. She shows that for Scotus, there was a difference between particularity and individuality, and that haecceities were the means of securing individuality. But since according to Scotus every unity presupposes a unity-maker with entitative status, haecceities must be entities, not properties, as it is claimed today.

The penultimate paper in the collection, by Arto Mutanen, is titled *Who am I?* The author claims that this question is in fact a cluster of questions with a host of different answers. First, he ties the question to the notion of identification and shows how it is handled in referentially opaque contexts. Second, he turns to the mind-body problem to distinguish the notion of identification from the notion of identity. Identity, he argues, is an ontological notion while identification is a methodological one, comprising the methods and techniques used to define an individual. In the second half of the paper the author assesses the approaches to identification by Hintikka, Russell and Gleason.

The final piece is titled *Meta-Representational Me*. The author Takashi Yagisawa analyzes the notion of the first person singular, the notion of *me*. First, he argues that the concept of *me* is different from the concept of *self* and is not reducible to it. Then he inquires whether one could grasp the notion by means of the semantic analysis of “I”. He outlines Kaplan’s indexical theory of “I” and claims that in spite of its plausibility it fails to account for the notion of *me*. In particular, it cannot account for the fact that the notion of *me* only applies to me, while anyone can use “I” to refer to himself or herself. Also, Kaplan’s theory does not explain why “I” is a rigid designator, especially since its referent is not fixed causally, as is the case in typical “Kripkean” rigid designators. Yagisawa then goes on to argue that the notion of *me* is not a linguistic notion and that we can grasp the concept more adequately if we assume that it has its conceptual origin in representation. He shows that representation with the same content, object and recipient may occur in different ways and one specific form of representation is the *me*-way. Then he argues that we can extract the notion of *me* from the *me*-way representation by means of the so-called *way-to-thing shift*. Yagisawa concludes by giving a distinctive account of the rigidity of “I”.

The collection *Perspectives on the Self* brings a representative selection of topics related to the notion of self. The editor Boran Berčić has done a good job collecting quality authors with a shared interest, and writing an introduction with a careful exposition of the contents of each paper. The

level of the papers varies. Some are intended as an introduction to the subject, providing an overview of the various positions in the debate under discussion, thus being more suitable for undergraduate students. Others are more challenging and technical, with an intention to move the relevant debate forward. These will be appreciated by graduate students as well as academics. The collection is recommended for anyone who would like to get a quality exposition of the problems of the self in many of its various connotations.