

The self: between autonomy and heteronomy

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Much modern and contemporary philosophy tends to want to explain away autonomous self-consciousness and has the propensity to claim that self-awareness is only possible if the self is considered as an object. That is, the self is somehow constructed; it is really heteronomous. One great question that is certainly implicit in both the analytic and continental streams of contemporary philosophy is: does the 'self' exist after all? After all, a long line of thinkers from Hume to Nietzsche; from Wittgenstein to Anscombe; from Malcolm, Kenny and Dennett to Foucault and Lacan have all argued, in different ways, that the 'self' is a fiction.

Throughout the period of modern and contemporary philosophy, even many of those who strongly held that the self does exist tended to maintain a very thin view of the self. René Descartes, for example, was only looking for something about which he could have certain knowledge that it existed: he could be certain of 'I exist' as long as the word 'I' meant very little.¹ In order to avoid the possibility of error, 'I think' could only imply existence *at that very moment*; Descartes' *ego* could well have had no history!

John Locke too had a very thin view of the self. He wanted to avoid relying on a soul which cannot be inspected. So, for him, the self has to do with consciousness which can be extended backwards through memory of past mental and physical events and perhaps forwards to anticipations of events. Hence, for Locke, "the self is not determined by identity or diversity of substance, which it cannot be sure of,

1 See René Descartes, "Second Meditation", in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, VII: *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, Vol. II, ed. Ch. Adam and P. Tannery (Paris: Vrin, 1964), 3.

but only by identity of consciousness".² This leads to notorious problems: at the end of the day there is literally *no knowable owner* of these psychological events.

This very thin view led rather naturally to the denial of the self which David Hume notoriously articulates in the 1739 *Treatise of Human Nature*. There he claimed that, although he introspected and could find many perceptions, he could never find a 'self' connecting them together:³

In order to justify to ourselves this absurdity, we often feign some new and unintelligible principle that connects the objects together, and prevents their interruption or variation. Thus we feign the continu'd existence of the perceptions of our sense, to remove the interruption; and run into the notion of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation.⁴

He challenged the role of memory as a possible connective and went on to say:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other ... I never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but a perception ... [human beings] are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed one another with an inconceivable rapidity and are in a perpetual flux and movement.⁵

This Humean denial of the self influenced much contemporary analytic philosophy. However, it first greatly influenced Immanuel Kant who agreed with Hume that the concepts 'I' or 'self' do not pick out any object. Kant wanted to insist that the 'I that thinks' is a transcendental or logical – hence unknowable – *subject* 'captured' by means of apperception. He held that self-consciousness is not a cognitive attitude; 'I think' is a heuristic function of all possible experience without itself being a possible datum of understanding; 'I think' is *not* actual self-awareness but rather it is the specific form of consciousness. Hence, Kant thinks that the 'I' is not an object and it can, under no circumstance, be turned into an intentional object.⁶ Conversely, 'I exist thinking' is an empirical proposition that

2 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), II, xxvii, 23.

3 See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), Book 1, Part 4, Section 6, 252.

4 *Ibid.*, 254.

5 *Ibid.*, 252.

6 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge:

can be further expressed through synthetic judgements that depend on given intuitions.⁷ Hence, there is a difference between the person who experiences her life in space and time and the 'I' in the sense of the subject. The former can be known as object; the latter cannot be known but remains a 'formal pole'. This, in itself, was an enormously acute insight: Kant notes that the third-person perspective and the first-person perspective are irreducible to one another. This sets him apart from his German idealist successors,⁸ and also from more contemporary post-structuralists, who all rely on a third-person perspective from which, somehow, a first-person perspective could emerge. It must be said, however, that Kant believes that self-consciousness cannot exist except within processes of experiencing *something*. There can be no knowledge of the 'I' or the 'self' beyond the experiences one has. Object is irreducible to subject; empirical self-consciousness is *not* the transcendental self. This means that the science of psychology can have nothing to say about the transcendental 'I' of apperception. Once again, the subject 'I' has become as thin as can be. It has become a mere formal space.

These last two centuries have continued to witness a decline of 'thick' subjective vocabulary. The German philosophers broadly criticised the 'I as subject' conception of subjectivity: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, for instance, show no inclination to presuppose a subject in the sense of an individual unique person. To take G.W.F. Hegel, while he believes that there is no consciousness without self-consciousness,⁹ he also thinks that there can be no self-consciousness without intersubjectivity; he holds that there cannot be a subject that does not think of itself as essentially a 'we'. Hegel avers that "self-consciousness is desire".¹⁰ That is, self-consciousness is not self-regarding but it is self-positing where self-consciousness cannot be wholly autonomous or self-relating; the world of experience must be implied and retained. In reporting what I think – even to myself – I am really reporting what I take to be true; in being aware of what I desire, I am really avowing a possible plan of action in the world. In his fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* he discusses precisely this desire, the struggle to the death for recognition between subjects and the resultant master–slave social structure. Here, Hegel treats self-consciousness as a practical matter which requires striving and even struggle. It involves both self-affirming and self-negating; it issues judgements but is also aware that what it resolves to be the case might not be the case. This

Cambridge University Press, 1998), B408.

7 See *ibid.*, B428.

8 Broadly, in German idealism, *Ich* does not refer to the subject but rather to general features of human consciousness.

9 See Georg W.F. Hegel, *The Berlin Phenomenology*, trans. Michael John Petry (Dordrecht: Riedel, 1981), 55.

10 Georg W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §167, trans. James Black Baillie (New York: Cosimo Inc., 2005), 225.

means that there is opposition between self-consciousness and itself, a kind of self-estrangement which one must overcome. Self-consciousness is a negation of the otherness of experience; one is driven to overcome the indeterminacy, opaqueness, otherness, and disconnectedness of one's experience to reduce it to unity. Crucially, self-consciousness is an achievement which is, moreover, inherently social: "Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness".¹¹ It exists only as recognized. A subject can only be related to itself and the world within the context of conflicting desires. The relevant desire is that for recognition by others where there is a confrontation between two desirers in which each is not simply to be negated but *negates back* in deadly reciprocity. This is a contention that can only be resolved through the complete subjugation of one to the other; a tension which paradoxically means a historicised or dialogical account of rationality. Fundamentally, self-conscious beings do not have natures; they only have histories. And the history of self-consciousness requires an "Ego that is 'we', a plurality of Egos and 'we' that is a single Ego".¹²

The decline of the self was accelerated through the suspicion of thinkers like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Darwin and Freud who all raised doubts with respect to the alleged sovereignty of the self: the self is too opaque or slippery to be taken seriously.

Nietzsche's denial of the self, in particular, was greatly influential within the continental tradition. In 1887, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* he wrote:

There is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming. 'The doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything ... our entire science still lies under the misleading influence of language and has not disposed of that little changeling, the 'subject'.¹³

In contemporary philosophy this demise of the 'self' was rather loudly proclaimed by prominent proponents of both sides of the analytic-continental divide. Poststructuralists like Michel Foucault declared the death of the subject.¹⁴ Analytic philosophers like Gilbert Ryle interpreted self-consciousness as merely a higher order state of consciousness: "To concern oneself about oneself in any way, theoretical or practical, is to perform a higher order act, just as it is to concern oneself about anybody else".¹⁵ This would mean that self-consciousness, in the

11 Ibid., §175, 226.

12 Ibid., §177, 227.

13 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, transl. Walter Kaufman and Reginald John Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Press, 1967), I, 13.

14 See Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et Les Choses: Une Archéologie de Sciences Humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 333ff.

15 Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949), 195.

strict sense, does not exist: self-consciousness would have to do with first-person consciousness and this could not exist; only second- or third-person consciousness could be had. This is also taken to mean that self-identification could have nothing to do with self-consciousness understood in the subjective sense.

This leaves us with a number of related questions. One question is whether one could speak of a self. That is, could one speak of an 'I' as distinct from speaking of a 'me'? Another question has to do with the possibility of self-consciousness; that is consciousness of meself¹⁶ ... but in the first person. One needs to ask whether self-consciousness is completely dependent on one's relationships with others and on one's belonging to a linguistic community. That is, is consciousness prior to self-consciousness, or is self-consciousness – in the strong subjective sense – the primordial human capability? In this paper, I want to show that the many denials of self in the philosophical literature seem wrong. I also want to say something about the rich conception of the self in ancient philosophy and the way in which controversies over the self in ancient and mediaeval philosophy could help to illumine our contemporary notion of the self. After all, how could one retrieve the self? Does the self need rescuing after all?

Perhaps we can commence by noting that we can consider two paradigmatic ways of conceiving of the self in modern and contemporary philosophy.

One trend is to consider the self to be the principle of identity that stands apart from the stream of consciousness and which structures, and gives unity and coherence to this stream. This concept of self is a very formal and abstract one. The 'I' is seen as a pure subject or formal pole enabling experience. It cannot be experienced but must be presupposed. It is not *given* in any way but is a principle that I must presuppose to know any object.¹⁷ It is paradigmatically seen as pure *activity*. The 'I' is defined solely by its use; it has no referential function. To quote the early Wittgenstein:

We feel then that in the cases in which 'I' is used as subject, we don't use it because we recognize a particular person by his bodily characteristics; and this creates the illusion that we use this word to refer to something bodiless, which, however, has its seat in the body. In fact this seems to be the real ego, the one of which it was said '*Cogito ergo sum*'.¹⁸

16 This is what the *Oxford English Dictionary* says of the emphatic 'I myself' where "mē is perhaps a kind of ethical dative". After all we say 'himself' and not 'hissself'. See Richard Sorabji, *Self* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 20.

17 See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A402.

18 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 69.

Hence, the 'I' has a peculiar grammar:

The word 'I' does not mean the same as 'L.W.' even if I am L.W., nor does it mean the same as the expression 'the person who is now speaking'. But that doesn't mean: that 'L.W.' and 'I' mean different things. All it means is that these words are different instruments in our language.¹⁹

This means that any knowledge of oneself must be primordially *practical*. The subjective self is simply active, transcendental in a solely practical sense. It is purely *autonomous*. In Elizabeth Anscombe's development of Wittgenstein's writings about our use of 'I', she points out that there can be no question of searching for, or discovering, an entity corresponding to pure consciousness that serves as a principle of unity for one to be able to think of oneself. Nor does one gain knowledge of one's own mental states by looking inward, as it were: there is *no* question of knowing one's mental states by regarding these as objects of one's internal gaze. According to Anscombe, 'I', when used as subject, does not refer at all.²⁰

A second way is to see the self as something evolving in being realised through one's projects. One is not a self; one is the result of self-interpretation. This view takes the self to be a construction. Selfhood is captured in self-knowledge which

19 Ibid., 67. Indeed, Wittgenstein passed through a number of stages in his thinking where he initially considered that 'I' can be used in two different ways: as subject and as object (notably in his *Philosophical Remarks* and, to a more attenuated degree, in his *Blue Book*). There, he averred that, when used as subject, there is no recognition of a person, nor is there any possibility of misidentification. Examples of this kind of use are 'I think it will rain,' or 'I have a toothache'. What is typical of the use of 'I' as object is that it involves reference or recognition of a particular person. According to the *Blue Book*, 'I' is used as object when the grounds for the attribution of the particular predicate are available, and when it is also possible that one errs in the ascription. Obvious examples of such cases are 'I have grown six inches' and 'I have a bump on my forehead' (see Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, 66f.). In such cases, he argued, 'I' is evidently being used demonstratively to indicate the object referred to; one may be wrong in what one says when one uses 'I' in such a fashion. He eventually realized, however that such thinking is a residue of Cartesian dualism: he saw, that even in sentences like 'I have broken my arm' there is no logical possibility of misidentification of *oneself* for another person, or mistake in this regard. In exceptional circumstances, one could, at most, mistake one's arm for another's: one could, perhaps, mistakenly attribute to oneself what would be correctly attributable to another. Such observations probably led to the collapse of the essential duality of the distinction in Wittgenstein's writing after the *Blue Book*. In the light of Wittgenstein's later work, it would, perhaps, be better to speak of a whole spectrum of *non-referring* sentences in the first-person, rather than a duality of uses of 'I'.

20 See G.E.M. Anscombe, "The First Person", in *Metaphysics and Philosophy of Mind: Collected Philosophical Papers*, Vol. II (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 21-36.

is expressed though narrative, where one provides a plot that brings out certain aspects that one deems to be of special significance and that define who one is, and that one presents to others for recognition and approval.²¹ One recounts a narrative that ‘emplots’ where one is coming from and where one is heading, where the self is constructed in and through the narrative itself. In Paul Ricoeur’s terms, *ipse* ultimately depends on *idem* in retaining a conception of the self.²² Such a narrative could be more or less fragmented, or more or less integrated but is always ‘under construction’. According to this view, the self does not exist but is made and remade through complex social interactions. One cannot be a self on one’s own but only in relation with others, as part of a linguistic community. One cannot be a self without using language. This is a *heteronomous* view of the self. The self is endlessly linguistically re-constructed ... there is no subject; there is only an infinitely pliable virtual object.

Here we seem to be torn between an infinitesimally thin autonomous self and a thick plastic heteronomous self with very little possible communication between the two. Two interrelated questions arise: one wants to ask whether the first conception of self as ‘I’ could not plausibly be ‘thicker’ and one also queries whether the second notion of the self (the ‘me’) does not call for an anchor in a thicker ‘I’ self.

Now, I want to show that the ‘I’ or self as indexical is irreplaceable to guide actions and to have beliefs. I further want to show that the ‘I’ is irreducible to the ‘me’: the first person is irreducible to the third person. I want to go on to say that the narrative self *presupposes* a subject or owner of beliefs and actions, psychological states, and bodily characteristics; that is, *idem* needs *ipse* to retain a concept of the self who possesses a meaningful identity.

Of course, the self – and self-knowledge – is certainly idiosyncratic! In much contemporary continental philosophy, for instance, it is held that self-awareness itself is simply impossible for the reason that the subject and the object of awareness must be distinct from one another. One can know oneself only as object; never as subject.

Here, it could be interesting to point out that it was Plato who started a tradition of doubt as to whether self-knowledge is even possible due to his misgivings about the comparable case of vision. For Plato, self-awareness is at best difficult and, ultimately, is only possible through seeing oneself as reflected in another. Indeed, this difficulty is connected to the *aporia* – rather widely discussed in antiquity – considering that self-awareness appears *prima facie* to be necessarily contentless. After all, it is doubtful whether one can see that one is seeing; one sees colour and

21 See Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit*, Vol. III (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1985), 442-443.

22 See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 113-118.

shape and not *seeing* itself.²³ If this is true, then self-encouragement, self-questioning, self-persuasion, and self-deception would all be cases where one part of the self moves another as Aristotle claims in the *Physics* for the self-movement of *material* things.²⁴ However, Aristotle himself would claim that self-thought is different: in the act of thinking, the intellect is identical with whatever it thinks and hence the intellect *can* think itself.²⁵ In the case of a divine intellect that is pure act, this happens directly, continuously and effortlessly; in the case of our understanding, perception, opinion and discursive thought (which all include material processes), Aristotle claims that this happens as a side-effect.²⁶ In whichever case, for Aristotle, self-thought would not be contentless. The divine thinker, for example, may be thinking of the first principle of practical reason and, in so doing, would be thinking itself since, in so thinking, the proposition it is thinking is, in a way, identical with itself. The human thinker would apprehend himself as he is apprehending – in this case – the first principle of practical reason, and as apprehending himself, and as apprehending that he is apprehended by himself.²⁷

Now this could all be very well but one still appears to face the difficulty of a possible infinite regress in self-awareness. As Sextus Empiricus pointed out, if one part is apprehending another part, how would the apprehending part be, in its turn, apprehended? Does not an infinite regress of acts of awareness threaten?²⁸ One is reminded of the infinite regress of images in two parallel mirrors. This difficulty is similar to the first in that it hinges upon the supposition that the whole cannot be both apprehended and apprehender. However, once again, one needs to consider that the whole *could* be both apprehender and apprehended – just as what is taught could be identical with what is learnt.²⁹ An infinite regress of acts of self-awareness does not even begin.

Perhaps the greatest exponent of a certain autonomy of self-knowledge was Augustine. He held that the soul knows itself by being present to itself.³⁰ So the soul does not need to seek itself nor does the soul need to see itself reflected in the eyes of another. To put it clearly, for Augustine, soliloquy is prior to communication.³¹ Self-knowledge is prior to knowledge. There are, of course, possible mistakes in

23 See Plato, *Charmides* 167A–169C.

24 See Aristotle, *Physics*, VII, 1 (241b34–242a35); he points out that it is different with that which is immaterial (see Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII, 5).

25 See Aristotle, *On the Soul*, III, 4 (430a2–4); *Metaphysics*, XII, 7 (1072b20–24).

26 See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 9 (1074b35).

27 See Sorabji, *Self*, 210.

28 See Sextus Empiricus in his *Adversus Mathematicos*, 7.284–286; 310–312.

29 See Aristotle, *Physics* III, 3. See also Aristotle, *On the Soul*, III, 2 (425b26ff.), where he says that some perception will be of itself so that we ought to posit this in the first instance. Hence, no infinite regress ensues.

30 See Augustine, *On the Trinity*, X, 3. 5; X, 7. 10; X, 9. 2; X, 10. 16; X, 8. 1.

31 This same position is shared by Husserl in his later writings.

self-knowledge but these are due to a reliance on images and traces of bodily things.³² The soul is more internal to itself than any images or words could be.

Does this mean that the soul knows itself completely? Of course not! There are two levels of self-awareness. One is what Augustine called *nosse*, or *notitia*; the other is *cogitare*. The former is possessed continuously throughout one's life – it is possessed even by infants and is therefore implicit and background and non-cognitive; the latter is a matter of thinking about oneself which requires a turning back on oneself which can well be impeded by the bodily senses. *Nosse*, therefore, is bound to the memory: just as a person knows letters even when she is thinking of other things not of letters, so the person knows herself even when she is not thinking of herself.³³ Through *nosse*, the soul already knows itself as a whole even if it does not know the whole of itself.³⁴ The soul is always present to itself even in the infant. *Cogitare* is about the soul, “thinking itself, not as across a space but by an incorporeal conversion”.³⁵ The relationship between the two is brought out in the following:

When by thinking the mind views itself as understood, it does not generate that knowledge it has as if it had previously been unknown to itself. Rather, it was customarily known to itself in the way that things are known that are contained by memory, even if they are not thought.³⁶

As Augustine very famously put it:

But who will doubt that he lives, remembers, understands, wills, thinks, knows, and judges? For even if he doubts, he lives. If he doubts where his doubt comes from, he remembers. If he doubts, he understands that he doubts. If he doubts, he wants to be certain. If he doubts, he thinks. If he doubts, he knows that he does not know. If he doubts, he judges that he ought not rashly to give assent. So whoever acquires a doubt from any source ought not to doubt any of these things whose non-existence would mean that he could not entertain doubt about anything.³⁷

32 See Augustine, *On the Trinity*, x, 3. 5; x, 5. 7 - 10, 6. 8; x, 10. 16.

33 See *ibid.*, xiv, 6. 8-9.

34 See *ibid.*, x, 4. 6.

35 *Ibid.*, xiv, 6. 8-9, lines 31-32.

36 *Ibid.*, xiv, 6. 8-9, lines 45-49.

37 *Ibid.*, x, 10. 14.

Hence, for Augustine, one is by nature present to oneself even if one could absent oneself from oneself by searching for oneself outside oneself through images. That would be an act of dispersion. One does not come to know oneself by seeking oneself outside oneself; neither does one come to know oneself primarily through others: the soul is fundamentally present to itself and does not need to seek itself.³⁸

38 The problem of self-awareness and self-knowledge is later discussed by Thomas Aquinas in a small number of texts in which the principal philosophical concern appears to be that of reconciling the Augustinian and Aristotelian approaches to the soul's knowledge of itself. To this effect, Aquinas uses a basic psychological fact – the experience of intellectual self-awareness – which he generally expresses by the phrase, *hic homo (singularis) intelligit* 'this individual human being understands'. He holds this to be a basic human experience that all readily acknowledge as real and central to our lives (see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 76, a. 1, where he goes on to say "For each one of us experiences himself to be the one who understands" [*experitur enim unusquisque seipsum esse qui intelligit*]). In the *Summa*, Aquinas goes on to distinguish two different ways in which the soul knows itself through its own act: one particular, the other universal. The universal type yields the sort of knowledge which Aquinas identifies as involving "diligent and subtle inquiry". Conversely, the particular knowledge that the intellect has of itself through its act refers to the simple act of self-awareness, "according to which Socrates or Plato perceives himself to have an intellectual soul, from the fact that he perceives himself to understand" (*percipit se intelligere*). For this sort of knowledge, unlike the other, "the presence itself of the mind (*ipsa mentis praesentia*), which is the principle of the act by which the mind perceives itself, suffices." (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 87, a. 1). An earlier and more detailed examination of the mode of human self-awareness is to be found in *De Veritate* x, 8. There, Aquinas uses a slightly different terminology, but his position remains the same. In his discussion, the basic division of self-awareness is expressed in terms of common (*commune*) and proper (*proprium*) knowledge. Once again, the soul's common knowledge of itself is identified as the only manner through which the soul apprehends its own nature. The soul's proper knowledge of itself is that which pertains to the soul "according as it has being in such and such an individual," and, as in the *Summa*, it is described in epistemic terms that are more vague, as the knowledge whereby one "perceives that he has a soul" (*percipit se habere animam*). Here, the common mode of knowledge is described as knowledge of the soul's nature – its *quid est* – and of its proper accidents (*per se accidentia eius*), whereas the proper mode is merely knowledge by the soul of whether it exists – its *an est* (see Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* x, 8 [321b207-216]). The *De Veritate* also introduces a further distinction between actual and habitual self-knowledge. Actual self-knowledge refers to the soul's specific perception of itself through its acts – its awareness, at the time, that it is exercising some activity. For this sort of self-knowledge, Aquinas emphasizes – in an Aristotelian fashion – the need for the intellect to be actualized by some object, since "to understand something is prior to understanding that one understands" (Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* x, 8 [321b229-234]). Habitual knowledge, however, seems to involve a direct, non-Aristotelian mode of knowledge of the self: "But as for habitual knowledge, I say this, that the soul sees itself through its essence, that is, from the fact that its essence is present to itself, it is able to enter into the act of knowing itself" (Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* x, 8 [321b234-238]). The spontaneity of this kind of self-knowledge resembles the effortlessness with which someone who has acquired a habit can with ease embark upon the use of that habit, as a grammarian, for example, can easily speak grammatically at any moment (See Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* x, 8 [321b238-322a246]). The soul's habitual knowledge of itself thus seems to indicate that the soul, by its mere presence to itself, is already

One might want to add that – most unlike Descartes – where there is presence to self, there is time.

Now this certainly appears to be counterintuitive to many. Much contemporary German and French philosophy sets store on the idea that the self is nothing but a web of relationships. Others enter and *form* one's identity which is understood as a persona or a woven narrative. One's conception of oneself is nothing but the web of relations that is thereby formed through time.

This 'relational' conception of the self which also has a venerable history and should be taken seriously. The idea that one knows oneself through knowing others so that others enable one to know oneself is to be found even in ancient Greek philosophy.

Plato in the *First Alcibiades* notes that "if an eye is to see itself, it has to look at [another's] eye ... with a soul too, if it is to know itself, it must look at a soul, and especially at that place in a soul where the excellence of a soul is generated, namely wisdom".³⁹ Plato goes on to say that the soul does so best by looking at the clearest and purest and brightest mirror of them all – God.⁴⁰ Aristotle too often appears to agree that self-knowledge is the fruit of knowledge of others. His position is far more nuanced however. He speaks of both self-knowledge and self-love, where love for friends appears to be based on love for self, whereas self-knowledge appears to be based on knowledge of others.⁴¹ Nevertheless, he also thinks that "as the good man is related to himself, so he is related to his friend, for the friend is another self".⁴² Here he appears to start from one's inevitable awareness of one's own activities and *then* coming to appreciate one's friend. Perhaps one can understand better what Aristotle could have in mind if one continues to read the passage which states:

able to apprehend that it thinks, senses, is alive, and so on; it does not need to acquire anything in order to realize actual knowledge of its *an est*. Rather, it is already in possession of such a disposition from the outset; nothing needs to happen to it in order that it acquires self-awareness. Habitual self-knowledge is already present then but, it, of itself, does not provide any knowledge of one's own nature. The soul knows itself actually in the same manner that it knows other objects, namely, by abstracting from images, forming concepts and judgments, and acquiring intelligible species (See Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, x, 8 [322a247-b95]). See Deborah L. Black, "Consciousness and Self-Knowledge in Aquinas's Critique of Averroës's Psychology", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31 (1993): 23–59.

39 Plato, *First Alcibiades*, 132E-133C.

40 See *ibid.*, 133C.

41 See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, viii, 12 (1161b18-19; 27-29); ix, 8 (1168b5-10).

42 *Ibid.*, ix, 9 (1170a29-b14).

He needs, therefore, to be conscious of the existence of his friend as well. And this will be realised in their living together and sharing of discussion and thought; for this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of man, and not, as in the case of cattle, feeding in the same place.⁴³

Here, Aristotle appears to be alluding to the phenomenon of shared perceiving between friends where one does not only perceive the same thing as one's friend but one is also aware that each is perceiving the same thing. If this is true, then this shared perception appears to presuppose one's self-perception and self-knowledge. He says elsewhere that "life in society is perception and knowledge in common. And self-perception and self-knowledge is most desirable to every one".⁴⁴ Thus, although friendship between good people enhances self-awareness, self-awareness appears to be *implied* in shared perceiving between friends. This appears to be confirmed by Aristotle's affirmation that one is always aware of one's own activities such as one's seeing, hearing, walking, perceiving, thinking, remembering, living and existing.⁴⁵ Thus, he appears to disagree with Plato – and go along some of the way with Augustine – on the soul's invariable self-awareness of its own activities. Aristotle believes that self-awareness is necessary if one is to be able to judge that the perceptions of sweet and white belong to a single body precisely because such a judgement requires a recognition of the simultaneity of one's perceptions, and also because one also needs to discriminate correctly between the senses involved in one's own perception of sweet and one's own perception of white:⁴⁶ they are different kinds of perception of the same object. Hence, perception does not only imply the activity of one's perceiving but also involves one's self-perception. For Aristotle, after all, it seems that knowledge implies self-knowledge.

It is very interesting that Aristotle based some of his arguments for self-knowledge on what has been called 'shared attention' or 'joint attention'. This uniquely human capacity is observable at around the ninth month. The infant becomes aware of herself as a conscious being as she becomes aware of her carer as a conscious being. That is, the infant not only gazes attentively but tries to make the carer align her gaze with hers and thus finds pleasure in this successful alignment.⁴⁷ Another similar phenomenon is that of 'social referencing' where the

43 Ibid., IX, 9 (1170b13-14).

44 Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, VII, 12 (1244b24-25).

45 See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 9 (1170a29-30); See also *On Sense Perception*, 437a27-29; *On the Soul*, III, 2 (425b12-25), *On Memory*, 452b26-28.

46 See Aristotle, *On Sense Perception*, 447b10-448a1.

47 See Michael Tomasello, "On the Interpersonal Origins of Self-Concept", in *The Perceived Self*,

infant seeks the approval of the carer.⁴⁸ At this stage, it appears that the infant becomes self-aware of her psychological attributes. She begins to be aware of herself as a being with mental activities. It is interesting that this takes place in relationship. *Pace* Descartes, the infant does not infer that her carer's consciousness exists through an interpretation of her carer's behaviour and clothing. Nor could her awareness of her carer and her self-awareness be separated: both are intertwined in one experience. What appears to happen is that the infant becomes aware of the divergence between her own attention and her carer's attention.

Very interestingly, what appears to happen earlier in the infant's life is also reminiscent of some of Aristotle's views. Richard Sorabji, basing himself on the work of Ulrich Neisser, Colwyn Trevarthen and others, notes that:

Infants do not, and cannot afford to, see the world as mere spectators perceiving patches of colour. They need to see the world, if they are to cope with it, in relation to themselves. They have to see things as within reach or out of reach of themselves, as likely to support them or not, as in danger of colliding with them or not.⁴⁹

Of course, one could argue that, perhaps, the infant should be described as seeing in terms of 'within reach' or 'out of reach' *without* any specification of 'I'. But this merely appears to mean that the 'I' is not in contrast to anybody else; the infant *does* appear to be aware of her bodily self. In Brian O' Shaughnessy's view, the infant starts with awareness of her mouth in relation to the breast. Her self-awareness – and awareness expands from there.⁵⁰ This appears to concur with Aristotle's views on infancy. What strengthens the connection with Aristotle is the idea, in some contemporary analytic writings, that the content of perception need not be conceptual. Christopher Peacocke notes that one can perceive a mountainside as having a very particular crinkly shape without having a concept of the distinctive shape.⁵¹ Gareth Evans agrees.⁵² Aristotle notes that one can consider rudimentary concepts that may be extended to animals.⁵³ Perhaps one

ed. Ulrich Neisser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 174-184, in Sorabji, *Self*, 25.

48 See Saul Feinman, "Social Referencing in Infancy", *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 28 (1982): 445-470, in Sorabji, *Self*, 26.

49 Sorabji, *Self*, 23.

50 See Brian O' Shaughnessy, *The Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 244-281.

51 See Christopher Peacocke, "Analogue Content", in *Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society*, supplementary volume 60 (1986), 1-17.

52 See Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 229.

53 See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, II, 19 (99b35-100b5).

could say, with Peacocke and Evans and José Luis Bermúdez,⁵⁴ that infants see things as within reach of themselves without having a concept of themselves. The infant's self-awareness – of its bodily self – could well be non-conceptual. Bermúdez claims that these primitive forms of self-consciousness are already present at birth:

If the pick-up of self-specifying information starts at the very beginning of life, then there ceases to be so much of a problem about how entry into the first-person perspective is achieved. In a very important sense, infants are born into the first-person perspective. It is not something that they have to acquire *ab initio*.⁵⁵

Thus, a newborn does not need to grasp concepts of pain, thirst or hunger in order to feel a kind of self-sensitivity. Moreover, it appears plausible that infants' very learning of speech depends on the prior capacity of shared attention. In learning to speak, the child sees herself, the significant other, and the object being referred to as all being involved in shared attention. This appears to apply both to the theoretical sphere wherein things are named and to the practical sphere in which objects are manipulated.⁵⁶ After all, both spheres are intertwined.

These are not strict arguments for the 'self'. I am simply saying that our experience of the world is in terms of 'I' and 'I again'. I am also stating that this appears to be a condition for the possibility of experience itself. While this is not a formal proof, it does place the onus of disproof on the person who wants to show that that on which life experience depends is only an illusion.

Indeed, it appears that we cannot experience or cope with the world at all without this being in terms of 'I'. Indexicals, like 'here', 'now', 'present' and 'I' are irreplaceable because they guide self-understanding and action. 'Thank goodness that's over' "certainly doesn't mean the same as, e.g. 'Thank goodness the date of the conclusion of that thing is [Friday, December 5, 2014]', even if it be said then. (Nor, for that matter, does it mean 'Thank goodness the conclusion of that thing is contemporaneous with this utterance'. Why should anyone thank goodness for that?"⁵⁷

In a similar manner, if Mark Sultana knows 'Mark Sultana is to catch the plane on the 23 December 2014', he will have no idea of what he is to do unless he also knows 'I am Mark Sultana', and 'Today is the 5 December 2014, so that

54 See José Luis Bermúdez, *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, 1998), 54-58.

55 *Ibid.*, 128.

56 See Tomasello, "On the Interpersonal Origins of Self-Concept", in *The Perceived Self*, 174-184, in Sorabji, *Self*, 28.

57 Arthur N. Prior, "Thank Goodness That's Over", in *Philosophy* 34 (1959): 17.

the 23 December is 18 days away'. Otherwise Mark Sultana could be anyone and the 23 December 2014 could be any day. Now, 'I' could perhaps be *roughly* paraphrased by other indexicals, like 'The thinker of this thought', or 'This person', that are egocentric or token-reflexive.⁵⁸ However, 'I' thoughts have a meaning which goes beyond 'Mark Sultana' thoughts, where this meaning is essential for Mark Sultana to live *as a person* in a responsible manner with others in the world. Indeed, I hold that there are no conceptual problems in one's use of 'I' to refer to oneself. 'I' *can* refer, since I am a person among other persons and, in order to use 'I', I must understand that to be a first person is also to be a third person (and this, not in the sense that I am only a third person for others, but that I can make sense of identifying a person, conceived from the standpoint of an objective view of the world, as myself).⁵⁹ That is, I must be able to attribute to myself various properties, which I can conceive of as being satisfied by beings that are not necessarily myself, and be able to conceive of myself as a being of the kind that I identify when I conceive of someone in my position (say, someone observing a house; alternatively, one could even focus on the pure spatial relation between oneself and the house). In this sense, thinking of myself would require a certain kind of keeping track of myself.⁶⁰ However, while an 'I' thought is true if and only if the corresponding 'Mark Sultana' thought is true, one fact that I must know to be able to be a personal and responsible agent is 'I am Mark Sultana'. Even more primitively, for me to be aware, I need to be self-aware.

Now, it is almost a truism that all our experiences are characterised by a subjective 'feel'; a certain phenomenal quality of 'what it is like for me'.⁶¹ This is obviously true for bodily sensations like pain and hunger but it is also true for perceptual experiences, feelings and moods. There is something it is like to see a sunset, or to feel happy or loved. There is also something it is like to have beliefs. There is a qualitative 'feel' or experiential dimension to, say, belief in God, which is different from that in disbelief in the existence of God. Of course, the intentional object of one's sensations, perception, feelings or beliefs is, in principle, public. Two persons could be feeling the same pain, or enjoying the same sunset, or sharing belief in God. However, they cannot share the subjective 'feel' of each experience. One's sensations, feelings and thoughts are immediately characterised by a first-person 'givenness' that immediately and non-inferentially presents them as mine. As Wittgenstein memorably argued, it is meaningless to be in doubt about whether

58 See Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 71-114.

59 See Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, 210.

60 See John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 102.

61 See Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?", *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974): 436, and John R. Searle *The Rediscovery of Mind* (Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, 1992), 131-132.

I am the one who avers 'I think it will rain,' or 'I have a toothache'. I cannot be in doubt or mistaken about who the subject of those utterances is, if the subject is myself.⁶² In each case, the avowal is presented precisely as *mine*. Of course, the concomitant 'I' consciousness need not be strong. Nor need it be explicit. It may well be athematic and implicit. Nor need it be a special manifest experience of self. In this sense, self-consciousness appears to be continuous and is pre-reflective; it is tacitly present even if one is not consciously scrutinizing oneself. Primitively, this speaks of "the acquaintance with an experience in its first-personal mode of presentation, that is, from 'within'".⁶³ Thus, I am never only conscious of an object, but I am always somehow conscious of *my* experience of the object where this experience is not reflective, although it could become reflective.

Conversely, reflective self-consciousness is an articulated and lived development of this more primitive self-consciousness. Reflective self-consciousness is the more developed kind of self-consciousness and is often expressed in narrative form. It is an exercise using introspection and memory where one directs one's intentional gaze onto oneself, taking oneself and one's history as an *object*. This way of seeing the self as evolving and as the result of self-interpretation (as I referred to above in speaking of the second way of considering the self in contemporary philosophy) is certainly present and vitally important in one's life, but is necessarily dependent on the subjective pre-reflective capacity of self-consciousness.⁶⁴ Perhaps we can speak of the first immediate and

62 Or *meself* as explained above. Of course, here one uses 'myself' to speak about one's subjective experience. While it is true that, in speaking of subjective experience, one is making subjectivity an intentional *object*, one is really unfolding in 'objective' philosophical discourse what is primarily experienced subjectively. Of course, one can seriously interfere with certain aspects of one's inner life by engaging in self-observation. This does not mean, however, that one cannot speak (objectively) of subjectivity at all. After all, even if one cannot speak or even engage in self-observation during some very personal and engaging experiences, one could speak *after* an experience of the experience's subjective presentation.

63 Dan Zahavi, "Phenomenology of Self", in *The Self in Neuroscience and Psychiatry*, ed. Tilo Kircher and Anthony David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 61.

64 In fact, as Dan Zahavi argues, this means that an attempt to explain self-consciousness in terms of the higher-order representational theory cannot be right. According to this theory, a mental state becomes conscious (rather than non-conscious) if it stands in the relevant relation to a higher order thought or perception about that state (see the work of David Rosenthal, "Unity of Consciousness and the Self", in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103 [2002-3], 325-352, and William Lycan, "The Superiority of HOP to HOT", in *Higher Order Theories of Consciousness*, ed. Rocco W. Gennaro [Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishers, 2004], 93-114). Holding such a theory would mean, of course, that infants could have no subjectivity: there could be nothing it is like for them to be conscious of their own pain – a claim which seems implausible at best. But the hard philosophical question such higher-order representational theorists need to answer regards the very possibility of non-conscious processes in and of themselves being the explanation of self-consciousness. That is, how could being the object of a non-conscious second-order thought or perception be enough to

implicit self-consciousness in terms of self-awareness and the second, derived, explicit, reflective, and often objectifying, conceptual and narrative form of self-consciousness in terms of self-knowledge. With respect to self-knowledge, it is easy to see that mistakes and doubts are very possible; it is also easy to see the importance of accompaniment of friends and significant others due to the ever-present possibility of self-deception.⁶⁵ With respect to self-awareness, it is easy to see why Augustine held that one is by nature present to oneself. This is reflected in his distinction between *se nosse* and *se cogitare*; the former expresses self-presence while the latter has to do with self-knowledge. *Se nosse* indicates one's experiencing oneself subjectively and non-intentionally – whether conceptually or non-conceptually –, 'from within'. *Se cogitare* is self-reflection as an intentional act where one encounters oneself objectively, 'from without'.⁶⁶

Thus, *se nosse* is what is involved when we speak of one's having self-confidence or self-pity, or shame, or pride, or self-acceptance, or self-irony, or self-deception or self-integrity. In each case, we are speaking of more than a cognitive relation of the person to herself.⁶⁷ For example, we want to say that self-deception is, in significant ways, different from someone's deceiving someone else. Such cases as self-deception are not merely a matter of the stance a person takes towards herself either. It appears that self-relations ineluctably involve a subjective experience. It is as subject, and not only as object, that one deceives oneself or accepts oneself. Of course, *se cogitare* is concomitantly present and significant – one's friends, or even oneself in one's more reflective moments, could come to recognize what one is doing. One can come to understand that the circumstance about which one is deceiving oneself is thinkable by others or even by oneself from a third-person perspective.

My conclusion is that there is a real difference between our consciousness of an external object and our self-consciousness: the first personal 'givenness' of

explain being conscious and even being self-conscious? One could add: how could a second-order state recognize that a first-order experience belongs to the same subject as itself? It appears that some prior acquaintance with itself is necessary as *given* at some stage. (See Zahavi, "Phenomenology of Self", 65). The higher-order representational theory can shed light on 'objective' self-consciousness but cannot provide an account for the first-person perspective in itself.

65 I am here using elucidations that Wittgenstein articulates in his set of notes *On Certainty* (see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe, ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977]). See my *Self-Deception and Akrasia: A Comparative Conceptual Analysis*, *Analecta Gregoriana* 300 (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2006).

66 See Ludwig Hölscher, *The Reality of the Mind: St Augustine's Philosophical Arguments for the Human Soul as a Spiritual Substance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1986), particularly the third chapter.

67 See John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1996), 90.

one's self-consciousness appears to be irreducible to a third person account of any kind. Of course, one's self-knowledge – which also has to do with one's being with others and with one's experience in the world – is intertwined with, and greatly enriches, one's self-awareness. That being said, I wanted to show that the self, as a subjectively experiential dimension, is an integrated part of consciousness itself: self-consciousness does not arise from a prior conceptual distinction between myself and the world nor does it arise from a notional difference between myself and other selves; it is already involved in the very possibility of such distinctions.