




The metaphysical self and the self in metaphysics and religion: Ambiguities of mind and reality

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Received: 27 May 2018

Accepted: 24 Sept. 2018

Published: 25 Feb. 2019

How to cite this article:Du Toit, C.W., 2019, 'The metaphysical self and the self in metaphysics and religion: Ambiguities of mind and reality', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1), a5125. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5125>**Copyright:**

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The thesis of this article is that the self is a construct or illusion and simultaneously real. The notion of self is constitutive in metaphysics and operates subconsciously and indirectly in all human activities. The metaphysical self constitutes its own reality. The article is critical of developments in cognitive science and neuroscience where neurocentrism reduces self to brain processes. The tenet is that the self is more than its biological make-up and the measurement of brain processes. The metaphysical as well as illusory aspects of self are discussed. Some important aspects of self that are visited include the construction of the self, its bodylines, contextuality, intentionality and unity. The nature of human intuition as grounded in our evolutionary make-up is proposed as a basis for the unity of the self. The role of the self in religion is briefly dealt with, focusing on the link between the notion of self and the concept of God.

Introduction: Consciousness and the human self

The human self has always been an elusive 'study object'. How do we study ourselves if we are the selves that must be studied? How do we switch between ourselves as thinking subjects and studied objects? How do we deal with our physically based abilities that enable us to be and to do what we do? We know little of these abilities and their autonomous working on physical and subconscious levels that codetermine who and what we are.

Notwithstanding this dilemma, the self was consciously or subconsciously taken as given since the dawn of human consciousness. We 'know' who we are, are mostly 'comfortable' with ourselves and act in light of our own self-understanding. Dennett (quoted in Gabriel 2017:1913 of 6449) sees the self as the 'rationalising centre of narrative gravity'. We all have our life story in which the self is the main protagonist in an open-ended and developing narrative.

The question is whether there is a fixed substrate like genes and environment that determines who we are and how we will develop. Gabriel¹ (2017) stresses the plural self:

... for human mindedness actually exists only in the plurality of self-conceptions. If we strip it from its differentiations into a plurality of self-conceptions, we wind up with an almost empty, formal core: the capacity to create self-conceptions. (loc 33/6449)

The self in all its complexity is a gift of evolutionary development through time and the way the self is understood by itself through its intuitions must probably be understood in this light. The consciousness of the self as one is probably an evolutionary given in order to help us interact meaningfully in our environment.

Historically, the self was understood on various levels, whether symbolically, religiously, mythically, etc. Frank (1994) declares:

If one were asked to specify the lowest common denominator of modern philosophy from Descartes to Sartre, it would not take much time to decide on the reply: this common denominator is self-consciousness. (p. 53)

Self-consciousness is always part of consciousness, directly or indirectly. It provides us with an overview of events, continuously updating our challenges, intentionalities, personal history, etc. Our specific perspective on things is updated according to new experiences and in light of the outcome of thought processes.

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1. Markus Gabriel (2017:loc. 366/6449) typifies himself as an anti-naturalist who accepts that not all things can be investigated by the natural sciences. He accepts that there are immaterial realities that we must acknowledge that are essential for understanding what it means to be human: Natural science will never figure us out, not just because the brain is too complex ... but also because the human mind is an open-ended process of creation of self-conceptions of itself (loc. 599/6449). He is critical of neurocentrism, which considers the self to be the brain (loc. 458/6449). We follow his drift in the article.

Notions of self are central to philosophy and theology. The idea that the self is a construction is recent. It can be dated back to the work of John Locke in 17th century and the beginning of modernism. Postmodernism has contributed to the notion of multiple selves. In spite of this postmodern recognition, I still experience myself as one, although in various modes of existence and in a variety of relationships. Some of the dimensions of self include the material, social, spiritual, economic, political, ecological, and extended self. The self can be related to aspects of one's activity, context, development, ideals, thinking and dreaming. Various methodological approaches could be used in determining the nature of the self or the relation we have with our own bodies, for example: physical, psychological, metaphysical, phenomenological and epistemological.

With the flourishing of cognitive and brain studies, new insights came to the fore. The drive to be more 'scientific' saw the replacement of philosophical, psychological and other forms of speculation with testable measurements. Inadvertently, these measuring techniques and the instruments that accompany them lead to the reduction of mind, consciousness and self to brain.

Contrary to Cartesian interpretation, consciousness is not an ontological entity in itself but depends on bodily and brain physicality. It simply depicts a state of mind, being awake and present somewhere. In this state you may remember something, focus on something or respond to some sensuous input.² You are aware (directly or indirectly) of your emotions and feelings. You may feel happy, angry, embarrassed, upset, bored, etc.

It is, however, 'I' that is conscious and it is my knowledge, expertise, wealth of experiences, memory and plans that determine how I am conscious and how I respond to my environment. Sartre (1977:103) explains the dominance of the 'I': '... the "I" is always given as having been there before consciousness and at the same time as possessing depths which have to be revealed gradually'. For Sartre (quoted in Lewis & Staehler 2010:133) experience in order to be experience must be unified by the ego, the I: '... it can be said to constitute a single unified experience only because each component part of it, each aspect, can be said to belong to me'. Consciousness and sense experiences are always unique (qualia phenomenon).

Is the self simply a metaphysical construct? If this was the case, would it differ from metaphysical constructs in general? Metaphysical constructs are as 'normal' to the human mind as are logical thinking, decision-making, acting, etc. The human self cannot be understood without the integration of physical and metaphysical, biological and cultural factors that all contribute towards the formation and 'identity' of the human self.

2. Animals are also aware of their environment and this is mediated by their senses and instinct. They have also memory of past experiences, but this is not on the same intentional and rational level as that of the human mind.

The self as metaphysical invention

Fichte 'invented' the self, the I (*ich*). He explored the 'I' in a novel fashion, spelling out its basic constituents. His understanding of consciousness and the self is explained in his *Wissenschaftslehre* and in *Foundations of Natural Right*. Fichte proposed three basic propositions to explain the self: I = I, I ≠ not-I (or self ≠ not-self) and I = the divisible self and the divisible not-self (see Gabriel 2017:loc. 3680, 3693 and 3749).

Proposition 1: I = I: Here 'I' is the knower, the subject and this is basic to any theory of knowledge (Gabriel 2017:loc. 3680/6449).

Proposition 2: I ≠ not-I: Basic to the idea of a self and for the understanding of self-consciousness is the distinction between I and not-I (not-me/not-self). The I is constituted by the not-I. The important breakthrough was to identify the self from non-self. The self is not the not-self. The non-self is everything outside the self and the self is not that thing or object but itself. This proposition accepts an independent and objective reality outside the self. This proposition also saves the self from nature. 'He was interested in telling us apart from merely natural objects, to draw a principled distinction between thinkers and things' (Gabriel 2017:loc. 3705/6449). The self is dependent on the non-self (receives itself from the non-self).

Proposition 3: I = the divisible self and the divisible not-self: here the 'divisible self' is the 'shareable self', where I can share my knowledge with other people like they share their knowledge with me (the divisible not-self) (Gabriel 2017:loc. 3774/6449). The divisible not-self is all external objects and things that the self can objectively know. Here we have to bear in mind that I cannot share my specific representation of something with someone. My representation of something depends on the psychological event where sensory impressions are processed (this includes the qualia phenomenon) (Gabriel 2017:loc. 3786/6449). The 'what it is to be me' cannot be shared.

Generally speaking, materialism focuses on the object while idealism deals with the subject. The importance of Fichte's exposition of the subject is that it cannot be thought without the object by which it is constituted (see Plato's distinction between the sensible and intelligible). Yet, the subject seems to be favoured since it posits the object.

Husserl and Sartre viewed the psychological ego or empirical 'me' as an object and not as a subject (Lewis & Staehler 2010:134). Sartre found consciousness' relation to itself as 'primarily epistemic, a reflective self-knowing, analogous to a subject's relation to an object' (Lewis & Staehler 2010:135). This is, however, problematic. We 'objectify' ourselves but it is not similar to experiencing an object in the world. The way we experience and interpreted objects can be tested inter-subjectively, while the self as 'object' is evaluated subjectively

and is not open to inter-subjectively the way worldly objects are. Sartre is right when he deems the self not as thetically given because the self changes all the time. The same cannot be said of all worldly objects. I cannot know worldly objects as I know myself. I know myself from 'inside'. We do not use our senses to know ourselves in the way we employ them to know outside objects. Knowledge of the self transcends objective knowledge. I am more than can be seen on a photo of myself and more than my reflection in a mirror. We know ourselves on many different planes and we interact differently with different people. See Merleau-Ponty's body schema (*scéma corporel*) (Lewis & Staehler 2010:169).

Nietzsche pointed out the link between the soul and the concept of substance (substantial ontology). He viewed the concept of substance as a consequence of the concept of the subject and not the reverse (substance as the foundation of the subject or materiality as the foundation of ideality). If we relinquish the notion of soul, the subject as a precondition for substance disappears. Classical Greek thinking identified the self with the soul (psyche). Plato posited the immortality of every person's soul, which was immortal and had a pre-existence before its incarnation into a human body (see Christ as *logos asarkos* and *logos ensarkos* – Word without flesh and Word within the flesh, analogous to the distinction between mind and body. God is Spirit, thus a-material, yet he encompasses all reality [panentheism]). Plotinus said that the soul can be material because matter can be divided and the soul is one or indivisible. 'If the soul had the nature of body it would consist of members each unaware of the condition of the other' (quoted in Barresi & Martin 2011:34). Descartes founded the self on the act of thinking. The 'I' as determined by human thinking was at the basis of Kant's philosophy as well. Here thinking represents a separate domain operating independent of the human brain without losing its connectedness to the brain and body.

The subject is but a term for our belief in a unity underlying all different impulses of the highest feeling of reality (Barresi & Martin 2011:43–44). This belief in the unity underlying all reality is basic to all metaphysics and marks the nature of self.

The link between substance and thinking is determinative for the idealistic position where mind determines reality and the human observer influences the turn of events (on quantum level).³ Here one can distinguish between two kinds of reality: reality created by the thinking self (the Kantian transcendental ego that determines and interprets reality through its innate categories) and reality as it is in itself. Reality in itself (*an sich*) is unknowable.

3.The quantum model seemingly fits the infinity of mind and helps us to understand how we can integrate a spectrum of ideas spread out over a lifetime of experience into one. Gabriel (2017) is critical: 'There is no such thing as a quantum theory of consciousness, as the kind of object actually characterized by quantum theory is precisely not conscious mental activity or intentional thought but, rather, anonymous processes subject to laws – that's all' (loc. 2549/6449). This may be so, but we cannot know that with any certainty. We do not know how 'anonymous processes' are really anonymous or how they translate into conscious thought.

For Metzinger (2011):

... the metaphysical underdetermination of cognitive neuroscience makes it tenable that mental, psychological, or phenomenological entities like 'self' are not proper individuals at all: they simply possess no clearly specifiable identity criteria. (p. 280)

The standpoint that the self is not a subsistent entity is based on the fact that it does not endure over time like the basic building blocks of reality. On theoretical grounds, the possibility is there to deny the existence of all substances or individuals (Metzinger 2011:280). In spite of this seemingly endless debate, we cannot do without metaphysics and the presupposition that accompanies it. Ideas are not unreal because they are metaphysical.

Consciousness and mind supervene on brain and corporal physicality. The human mind constructs and lives in a seemingly 'independent' world of its own. This makes it almost contra-intuitive not to think of the conscious mind as an independent reality (see Chalmers 1996:167). Analogously, matter can be analysed into its basic molecular structure and the atomic world that underlies it. All this conforms to basic laws, forces and fields that can be expressed in mathematical formulas and that follow physical laws. Information is basic to material reality. The question is whether this information exists in a separate realm independent of matter itself.

The historical-contextual self

Studies of self have been complicated by the multiplicity of perspectives on self and a variety of approaches to the self. On a natural level, the self cannot be understood without its world, neither without its specific environment (which includes the people who share our world), and how the self has adapted to this environment and has transformed it. We often neglect the way we are continuously shaped by our environment. Our environment is as dynamic and varied as the human self. Environment refers not only to the physical environment but also to the way it is represented and continuously reconstructed in our minds. Objective reality is always relative to the way we experience, interpret and construct it. Developments in technoscience and virtual reality are already affecting our experience of what it is to be human.

The self is given by its environment similar to the way that all species are determined by and interact with their environment. Part of the evolutionary development of all species is the ability to navigate and survive in their environment. This is a life-long process of trial and error, discovery and learning. Without this 'apparatus', no species would survive. The ability to survive depends on genes and instinct, supplemented by experience.

The self cannot be understood in separation from its 'givenness' by the world in which it is born. The world 'writes' itself on the human mind (on the Lockean 'clean slate') and codetermines our construction of the outside world. We grow up with the way our parents and peers understand the world,

and we add our own experience to this ongoing interpretation. The self is ‘... the ego clothed with the garments of society’ (Mohanty 2000:73). As our sensual and intellectual experience grows, the world gradually takes on form and we navigate our way through life always correlating the internal and external worlds.

Sartre viewed consciousness on its unreflective level when absorbed in the world as without the ‘I’. I am not aware of self apart from being engaged in the world. Therefore, he could say that we do not encounter the world and simultaneously experience the evaluation ‘I hate this’ but we directly encounter the world as hateful. In this mode, consciousness does not ‘posit’ the self; it is non-thetically conscious of the self (Lewis & Staehler 2010:137). Kant did not address the way we are in the world and how the self is influenced by the world. He focused on objective experience and how it is constituted by the transcendental ego. He did not try to explain how consciousness is biologically constituted in order to achieve this (see Lewis & Staehler 2010:133). Sartre took another approach to avoid difficulties related to Kant’s transcendental ego. He also explained conscious unity by intentionality. The intentional object gives experience to our feeling of unity with the world. The self ‘... becomes conscious of itself insofar as it is consciousness of a transcendent object’ (quoted by Lewis & Staehler 2010:135).

Gabriel (2017:loc. 2118/6449) distinguishes intentional consciousness (focusing on something) from phenomenal consciousness, which represents our subjective conscious experience. These two forms of consciousness are complementary. The I-it relation was addressed by Husserl’s notion of intentionality. Husserl sees intentional consciousness as ‘responsible for constituting the appearance of objects as we experience them’ (quoted in Lewis & Staehler 2010:21). Through intentionality, I take a specific attitude towards an object that I experience (2010:22). On an intentional level, I am one with the world.

The way the cultural world is represented in the human self must be understood historically. It changes from epoch to epoch. The peculiar way we represent the world is constitutive for the understanding of ourselves in a specific period. Heidegger realised later in his life that he viewed the world in his earlier thinking as a-historical and as a permanently valid entity while the world actually changes as our time and perspective of it change. In the words of Lewis and Staehler (2010:105), ‘There is not just “one” world there are many, and history happens when the world changes ...’. We update our world view continuously and this codetermines our interpretation of our specific context.

The bodily self

I have a body and I am a body. Mohanty (2000:75) sees the body as the null point around which my world gathers. From my body ‘... things in my surroundings receive their characterizations as far or near, to the right or to the left’, etc. Although we experience our bodies as one, they represent a

whole ecosystem of interacting processes running continuously. The self is embodied and disembodied. The embodied self is the physical me with its outward appearance and inner biological make-up. This includes the brain and the mind, as mind supervenes on brain. The disembodied self is the ‘inner self’, the minded self. We can also term it the thinking, metaphysical, transcendental and transcendent self. We cannot change the outer bodily self or its genetic make-up and we only have some influence on outward appearances like body weight, health, hairstyle and the clothing with which we adorn ourselves. As far as the inner self is concerned, the situation is seemingly different.⁴ We change over time and often try to ‘remake or redefine’ ourselves in time. It is an open question to what extent we have the ability to change ourselves. The self we hope to change is dependent on the self-image that we construct.

Our presence in the world is a bodily presence. Our existence is an ongoing incarnation, a way of inserting ourselves in the world, of becoming one with our world. We reconstruct the objective world into known environment, into a human setting. We make the world our *Heimat*. In this sense, the distinction of ‘inner-world’ and ‘outer-world’, similar to a strict Subject-Object divide, is one-sided. The outer objective world is coloured with the meaning we ascribe to it so that the outer world is codetermined by the inner world. With reference to Hegel’s idea of ‘objective spirit’, Gabriel (2017) says:

Our social reality is defined by a huge array of artefacts which embody meaning so that our everyday experience is one where we constantly encounter objective manifestations of mind. Our subjective mind is formatted in an encounter not with brute facts but with embodied meaning and social interaction. (loc 1080/6449)

The physicality of thought

In spite of the flourishing of brain studies and developments in cognitive science, human consciousness and the human self remain a mystery. We do not know how brain activities coordinate and give rise to the phenomenon of consciousness and self. The human self is bound to consciousness and remains to some extent as elusive as consciousness. The role of our bodies and the unconscious mind in co-determining consciousness are not clear.

Human consciousness or higher consciousness represents the zenith of evolutionary development because it represents the mode in which material reality develops into consciousness, awareness and self-perception. This is from a human point of view. Notions of non-human consciousness, and even abiotic forms of consciousness, have only recently entered the stage with studies on animal consciousness; the possibility of the development of self-thinking and autonomous computer programmes (robots)⁵ is represented

4. Compare in this regard the idea of ‘inner’ time or ‘existential’ time that differs from clock time.

5. On a virtual level one can imagine a ‘mind’ that encompasses all information, for example, Internet that may become self-conscious. There is something it is to be conscious of all there is to know. This endows human technology (if it can create such a self-conscious machine) with apothec features.

in notions of the trans-human⁶ and in ideas related to pan-consciousness as it is developed in Panpsychism. Consciousness studies are determinative for the revaluation of non-human forms of life, including abiotic reality, thematised by Panpsychism (see Nagel 1979; Strawson 1994, 2005).⁷ It brings the reality question into the spotlight. Gabriel (2017) expresses it as follows:

The very idea of a causal closure of reality relies on the notion that there is a purely natural reality, an objective realm occupied by processes and objects such that everything in that domain can be apprehended, described and explained with scientific precision and objectivity ... Notice that dualism looms large as soon as one supposes that there is a problem at all with the embedding of mind in nature. (loc 1022 of 6449ff.)

He emphasises that our image of the world (the universe as the only realm that exists) is not scientifically or physically verifiable but has to remain 'a pure article of faith' (Gabriel 2017:loc 1022 of 6449ff.).

Thought, rationality and emotion are biologically based. We cannot fathom how a thought can be physical. Is a thought autonomous, independent and self-working? Is it a subject? Can we ask in Nagelian fashion (see Nagel 1974:435ff.) what it is to be nerve carrying a thought? There is something it is to be a synapse⁸ – that physical creative activity where a new thought 'breaks through' or some action takes place.

We do not know or experience what the nerve cell experiences, if it experiences at all (does the medium know the message it is carrying?). We cannot imagine the synapse operating 'autonomously', providing us on a conscious level a solution to a problem.⁹ Thought is physical. The causal juncture between its physical operation and the conscious act of thinking remains a mystery.

In the idealist tradition, Schleiermacher has taken the lead in accommodating human biology (especially human emotion) in dealing with reason. Human beings are not simply bodiless minds. There is a unity between thinking and being (here being refers to human physicality and that implies mind-body unity) (see Thandeka 1995:81).

Schleiermacher distinguished between the physical aspect of thinking (the human brain) and the act of thinking (non-material part). He viewed the physical part of thinking as

6. In the sense of the trans-human or post-human, the question is to what extent humans may be able to manipulate and change the experience of self. The self will increasingly be determined by virtual realities in future.

7. Panpsychists argue that natural science does not make any positive claim about the intrinsic nature of reality. Basile (2010:95) quotes Russell (1948) in this regard, saying: 'It is only mathematical properties we can discover ... The physical world is only known as regards certain abstract features of its space-time structure – features which because of their abstractness, do not suffice to show whether the physical world is, or is not, different in its intrinsic character from the world of mind' (p. 240). This is a convenient quote for Panpsychists that propose mind/consciousness as the unitary factor of all reality (see also Basile 2010:96–104).

8. A synapse is the structure that permits a nerve cell to pass an electrical or chemical signal to another neuron, or between a neuron and a gland or muscle cell (effector).

9. It does not make sense to convey self-conscious to a table or computer because it probably does not have self-consciousness. The biotic realm is different from the abiotic and we do ascribe, for example, some sense to cells.

the pure I and called it the organic self. Today we would interpret this as awareness or consciousness. Schleiermacher found this aspect of self as one that 'remains' when we have stopped thinking. Consciousness is not thinking but simply physical awareness (e.g. not being asleep or comatose). What is significant of Schleiermacher's interpretation is that he viewed the pure I as the physical 'agency' uniting all experiences. The pure I would then be responsible for the feeling of unity, identity, self and personhood. Without thinking, I know who I am and have a sense of self, self-continuation, self-identity, etc. In the words of Thandeka (1995), the pure I is:

... the means of transition that makes possible the shift in our thinking from one determinate moment of consciousness to the next; it is that which is in between thinking. (p. 88)

Schleiermacher also referred to this state of simple awareness as the zero-point (*Nullpunkt* or *Indifferenzpunkt*) of thinking. This is prior to any intentionality or act of thinking performed by the subject (see Thandeka 1995:85).

Schleiermacher deviated from Fichte and typified his interpretation of the 'I' as 'pure thinking'. Fichte, like Kant, ignored the physical aspect of the self as well as its specific time- and context dependence. Schleiermacher's emphasis on the human body enabled him to make space for human emotion in thought and experience. Emotion codetermines the human subject, human thought and experience. Schleiermacher reinstated a vital and much neglected aspect of religion and grounded it in the experience of absolute dependence (*Gefühl der schlechthinnigen Abhängigkeit*). His notion of the self made this possible and it represents a breakthrough.

Self and world as illusion

David Hume (1987) explicitly stated that the self is an illusion. It was especially the fact that a unifying conductor could not be indicated that he reverted to the notion of multiple 'selves', hence the self as fiction (see Barresi & Martin 2011:41). If the self is a construct and is determined by its world (environment), then the question arises whether the world is not an illusion. This idea is expressed in the title of the 2015 book of Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist*. He follows the drift of Thomas Nagel's work and the idea that there is something it is to be a bat or for that matter any other thing or object. As we only know the world from the 'outside' and because the world 'exists' in an infinite number of perspectives, it cannot be known and the idea of the world as a single real aspect does not exist.

There is seemingly no empirical or conceptual evidence that the self exists. What are the implications of a no-self alternative? Metzinger (2011:279) states that the 'no-self' alternative may not be an alternative at all but simply functions as a default assumption for rational approaches to self-consciousness and subjectivity.

Eliminative materialism deems consciousness as illusory. Consciousness is seen as information processing states as can be measured in neuroscience.

We inhabit the world and are 'inhabited' by the world. This can only be understood in terms of the transcendental 'I'. The world as it is represented in the human mind is not the world '*an sich*' as it is in itself. It is an effective construction of the world and this construction serves to help us survive, flourish and negotiate our way in the world. The world as we understand it is thus a metaphysically constructed world, a world that hovers upon the 'real' world as it is in itself. This representation of the world is metaphysical in the case of all species. All species have some 'sense' of their environment and without this sensing of the world survival is not possible. The way the world is known and represented differs from individual to individual and from species to species.

Marcel Proust, well known for his brilliant literary rendering of human memory, interpreted the self or the 'true self' in this regard as an invention, a literary or artistic creation (Prendergast 2007:26). The link between varieties of the human self and its dependence on human memory underscores the self in its dynamic changing dimension. We 'reinvent' ourselves similar to how we recall memories differently over time.

The self as one

Consciousness is characterised by a feeling of oneness and unity. I am consciously aware of all sense stimuli that affect me. I am aware of my environment and sum up a situation in order to respond to it appropriately. We are often inundated by sense-experiences. Add to this an exciting context that stirs the emotion and that demands a rational and linguistic response. Sensations like colour, form, sound, body position and social relations are all represented in different parts of the cortex. How are they bound to a unified experience of consciousness? It makes sense that some brain organ and not a homunculus in the mind may be in control over all these cortical areas. All this can be rather complex, but complexity as we know marks human consciousness. It is highly complex. If it were less complex, the very nature of our consciousness would have been different. High levels of complexity are necessary for new forms of emergence.

We have to respond to a multiplicity of stimuli in a coherent and sensible way. This presupposes some 'mechanism' that unites all sensual, rational, emotional and other inputs into a unified whole. When the demand is excessive, we may feel disorientated and out of control. The question is where this seat of control is.

On the level of consciousness, the challenge to fuse various 'selves' and a variety of experiences into a unity remained unresolved until the 18th century when fission arguments were developed in support of an immaterial substance view of the self (Barresi & Martin 2011:41). This development was significant because it attributed independent realism to immateriality.

The question is how the self as subject focuses on itself as object without losing the unity of self. The self is ambiguous

because of its multiplicity. 'I know myself only in ambiguity', says Merleau-Ponty (quoted in Lewis & Staehler 2010:188). We experience the self as a unified whole. This does not mean that the self is one. We 'double' ourselves when we critically scrutinise our actions and our feelings of inadequacy. For Metzinger (2011):

... clear models of functional mechanisms exist which could parsimoniously explain the integration of individual property-representations into a unified self-representation. This approach needs no transcendental subject to stand behind the appearance of 'a' self as consciously represented, because it gradually emerges out of the self-organising interaction between a large number of simpler organs. (p. 282)

The question is as follows: what are these 'functional mechanisms' and how do they operate? It does not explain our feeling of being the same person over time and through multiple different experiences.

The quest for unity is a driving force in metaphysical thinking. To inquire, to want to know and force meaning on things seems to be a fundamental aspect of the conscious mind. The driving force behind this quest for a feeling of the interrelated causal connectivity behind everything explains metaphysics and much of religion. This force can be all-determinative like the ancient Greek idea of Ananke. Ananke was the Greek goddess that depicted impersonal fate. Not even Zeus could escape it. The Calvinist God is seen as omniscient so all possible future events are known to and predetermined by him.

It is seemingly not foreign to the human mind to posit both physical and a-physical forces as explanation. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, humans were looking for this magical explanatory force. It could be material substance (e.g. ground, water, fire and air) or immaterial concepts (e.g. number, movement and idea). Schopenhauer's notion of Will, Fichte's 'I', Hegel's Geist/Absolute and Spinoza's Substance are all examples of such a fundamental entity that is deemed to be foundational to everything. The unity of self characterises metaphysics and religion as well.

Evolutionally given intuition

The will to find meaning as well as the continuous construction of meaning characterises the human mind. We are seemingly not satisfied with simply being in the world. We want to know why we are here, why the world is the way it is and why we occupy the specific place in it that we do. We construct causal links attributing events to metaphysical forces in a causal way. Through the ages, different causal actors entered the scene and many of them persist. The gods take priority. For the Greeks fate played a great role, translated into luck for many. Philosophers posed foundational concepts like Substance (Spinoza), Will (Schopenhauer), Power (Nietzsche), Spirit (Hegel), Being (Heidegger), production relations (Marx) and revived stress on 'synchronicity' as can be found in New Age ideas. All of this changed with the revolution of science that replaced

linear causality with chance, natural law. Recently complexity and emergence entered the scene.

On the level of the human life-world, intuition plays a pivotal role. Intuitions operate on various levels ranging from our personal lives to the objective world to world view. Intuitions are bound to culture and context. They are often the driving force behind metaphysical models. We cannot easily trace or prove the exact origin and development of human intuitions. They seemingly operate on an unconscious level and surface consciously as a specific feeling, attitude and conviction.¹⁰

Human consciousness, and especially the notion of 'self', cannot be understood without the concept of intuition. The subconscious often surfaces as a specific intuition, a feeling, 'knowing' how to evaluate a situation and how to respond. It drives one to act 'intuitively' in a crisis situation. The unity of self is experienced intuitively. Intuition, or tacit knowledge, is difficult to measure and, consequently, epistemically underestimated. Intuition is very individual, based on experiences and often operates on subconscious level. We do not know how experiences are integrated and equip us to judge and act in the best way, to do the right thing and have an answer ready. We usually trust and follow our intuitions. It differs from normal learning where objective criteria exist to master something new. Intuitions and the concomitant understanding of self and world come to the fore in folk psychology, which must be reevaluated. Gabriel (2017) echoes this sentiment:

The self-knowledge of the human mind has long been much further advanced than the best scientific study of the neurobiological foundations of consciousness. To the extent to which scientists suffering from scientism intend to make a claim on advanced knowledge in all areas, this fact has long been a thorn in their sides. (loc. 2347/6449)

What is intuitive to us is what seems logical, what makes sense. This applies to the objective world as well as abstract thought. These intuitions change in time, but in the present we experience them as 'one'. Intuition is not limited to speculative ideas and includes factually based thinking and scientific thinking. The border between what we can prove and what 'simply feels right' is often vague.

Science makes sense although often based on models, metaphors and intuitive conjectures. These ideas are not always based on empirical observation. Intuition in the above sense represents a feeling of what is right, and how things may fit together. Intuitions operate on a metaphoric level evaluating the unknown in terms of the known. This must be distinguished from the way it is used in the

10. I prefer to use 'intuition' instead of 'instinct'. We tend to use 'instinct' for animal reflexive behaviour. This does not imply that consciousness and subconsciousness, including memory of past experiences, do not play a significant role in animal behaviour. Hume (1987) uses the term 'instinct' and not 'intuition' in terms of human conduct. His basic drift, however, is the same as ours: 'This instinct, 'tis true, arises from past observation and experience; but can any one give the ultimate reason, why past experience and observation produces such an effect, any more than why nature alone shou'd produce it? Nature may certainly produce whatever can arise from habit: Nay, habit is nothing but one of the principles of nature, and derives all its force from than origin' (p. 179).

philosophy of Kant. Kant (1998) talks in this regard of *a priori* intuitions:

[The] principles of geometry, for example, that in a triangle, two sides together are greater than the third, are never deduced from general conception of line and triangle, but from intuition,¹¹ and this *a priori* with apodictic certainty. (p. 56)

We are evolutionarily equipped with intuitions. Intuitions are vital for human survival and flourishing. Metzinger (2011) reminds that the:

... inner landscape of our space of intuitive plausibility is not only contingent on our evolutionary history and on certain physical and functional properties of our brains – it was optimized for functional adequacy only. It serves to sustain an organism's coherence and physical existence, but this does not mean that the content of intuitions is epistemically justified in any way. (p. 288)

Metzinger's statement does not exclude human rationality. Intuition is vital to our survival as we are often challenged to act immediately. Waiting too long to act may cost our life.

Human intuition is rational. It is intuitive to think that the Earth is flat and the Sun rises, precisely because it is logical. Science is usually counter-intuitive while human technology is more intuitively accommodating. Our intuitive logic serves our survival. Most species would be alerted by any form of movement, but only humans put a causal link between movement and what caused it (hence the quest for a prime unmovable mover, which inevitable enjoyed divine status because nothing greater can be thought about).

In a similar way, metaphysical questions serving a feeling of purposefulness (why we are here and what our destiny is) are a human datum. This grounds most religions, metaphysics, myths and superstitions.

The self is intuitively given. It is strongly linked to the way I am myself and feel myself. It represents my 'feeling' about something, values and judgement. The feeling that the self is always one can only be an intuition. This would explain why a feeling of unity and oneness dominated our interior space.

Consciousness and religion

The role of Christianity, including its pervasive '*Wirkungsgeschichte*', was and still is pivotal in the development of the human self. Jesus approached the individual with compassion and forgiveness. His ministry was one of promoting the freedom of humans from the bonds of sin, discrimination and insincerity by proclaiming the forgiveness of God and by presenting God as caring and loving Father. Paul stressed the 'remaking' of the individual and of the creation of a new self and new consciousness through atonement with God enabled by Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.

11. For Kant, 'sensibility' (*Sinnlichkeit*) makes intuitions possible. No cognition is possible without this input. Sensibility includes the faculty of imagination and imagination can transcend the empirical observable (geometry as example).

The self, it can be argued, was 'invented' by Descartes and Luther. Both of them singled out the individual and the inner conscious world of thought, meaning-seeking, guilt and dependence. But it was already Augustine who, in his *Confessions*, opened up the inner dialogue of the 'guilt-ridden' mind. The conscious inner world was occupied by sin, guilt, mortality and decay. The human 'soul' was lost and in need of salvation.

The object of consciousness can be God, the other, the self, nature, some intentionality of mind or driving force that inspires us. To become aware of the presence of God and to experience personal interaction with God represent some of the most profound aspects of human life. The self elevates itself above the quotidian, mortal mundanity, uncertainties and fears through interaction with its God.

To what extent would all of this be anthropomorphic projection as Feuerbach has indicated (Feuerbach 1893)? The relationship between God, self and self-consciousness is dense with complexity and often plays out on subconscious level. This includes the experience of 'being one with God' where the distinction between self and God fades away. Gabriel (2017) quotes Meister Eckhart in this regard:

If I had not been, there would have been no God: I am thus the cause of the fact that 'God' exists; if I had not been, God would not be 'God' ... in bursting forth I discover that God and I are One. (loc. 3528/6449)¹²

God is one, comparable to truth and the experience of the self as one. There has to be One God (Theism) and not many as that would constitute the possibility of discord and competition. Similarly, the self has to be one (unless it is schizophrenic) in order to act in a consistent and coherent manner. We are often at discord with ourselves and remain uncomfortable until it is resolved. We are uncomfortable when we lie or pretend to be what we are not and consequently plagued by conscience. The Latin word for conscience *conscientia* is the assimilation of *con* [together] and *scire* [to know]. To know together means to share knowledge and knowledge must also be one (congruent). The dialogical self includes discord as it comes to the fore in struggling when we have a bad conscience. Here societal and personal values (see Freud's superego) come into play.

The place where the gods appear are in the human mind. A theology of consciousness represents the notion of becoming mindful of the integration of everything in a transcendent unifying principle. A theology of higher consciousness entails the notion of pantheism, where everything exists in God. This would include the cosmic Christ as well (see Teilhard de Chardin's notion of the Cosmic Christ). He developed a theology based on paleontological and biological insights. There is an evolutionary development from the beginning of creation moving towards its fulfilment in the Omega point –

¹²Neural impulses can travel a fundamentally different route through the same labyrinth of neural circuits. In this rare mode, senses, time and movement lose their usual perceptual boundaries. This mode is called a state of Absolute Unitary Being (AUB) and represents a mystical, religious experience (Holmes 1993:204). This unity can be achieved, for example, through intense discipline and mediation as practised by some Buddhist groups.

where all consciousness will be united in the Cosmic Christ. The final unity takes place on the level of the noosphere:

To make room for thought in the world, I have needed to 'interiorise' matter: to imagine an energetics of the mind; to conceive a noogenesis rising upstream against the flow of entropy; to provide evolution with a direction, a line of advance and critical points; and finally to make all things double back upon *someone*. (De Chardin 1959:318)

This *someone* is the Cosmic Christ, the Omega point, where God shall be all in all: '...the expectation of perfect unity, steeped in which each element will reach its consummation at the same time as the universe' (De Chardin 1959:322).

Conclusion

The last word about the human self has not been spoken and this should remain the case if human uniqueness was to remain intact. The mystery of the human self preserves its openness and transcendental character. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans or similar techniques cannot capture the human self, human consciousness or human rationality.

The self is a metaphysical and intuitive construct, as the concept of 'the world' is a construct. This does not make it less real. 'Reality' is constituted by the world in which we live, which is both the inner and outer world.

Human intuitions, human naïveté, human religions, myths and superstitions all contribute to what it means to be human. This does not represent a dualism or an anti-scientific or quasi-scientific stance but a different level of being alive. Science does not reflect on what it means to live, to experience, to believe, and to be.

Christian concepts of unity (unity of God, truth, believers and creation) align with the basic human intuitions of unity that accompany humanity since ancient times.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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