

project. On this point, Dennett is essentially correct. However, while Dennett maintains in large part the Humean claim that *no one has ever seen a self* and therefore agrees that the self is indeed some sort of fiction (albeit a narrative fiction), I contend that the self is not a fiction. The inability to pinpoint a centre does not entail its fictionality. To illustrate my point, consider the example of a car. The inability to pinpoint the centre of its *cariness* (whatever it is that makes a car a car) does not mean there is no car. Where is the identity of the car? Is it *in* the engine? The fuel injectors? The wheels? Certainly no precise point of the car *is* the car. Yet the car is not a fiction. What the car does have are internal and external components. It also has a centre of gravity that enables the car to cohere and maintain a certain unity. And we certainly gravitate towards the car when we think about it, talk about, work on it and want to use it. Just like a centre of gravity, the car pulls us towards it. Furthermore, whenever we talk about a specific individualized car, that car *is* physical. In this same way, then, I argue that selves are necessarily physical.

As a consequence, what I borrow from Dennett is essentially the idea that there is some point in space that draws in the others, that draws in the world—a point in space that I contend must be physical (even though, as Dennett points out, in science centres of gravity are theoretical abstractions). Just as things revolve around, are attracted *to*, pulled towards and get close *to* centres of gravity, the same applies to selves. A self draws in other people, other people that bring with them their concepts, values and emotions. But what is unique about selves, as opposed to other “objects” (like cars), is that a self does not only draw others towards it. A self *emanates*. What I have in mind here is nothing new. The idea that a self emanates as well as it *draws in* is traced back to G.W.F. Hegel⁽⁴⁾. In his well developed dialectical theory of self-consciousness, Hegel argues that

a self requires the presence of another self in order for each of them to validate their own *selves*. The process works like this: Two selves meet and as they draw the other in, they also *actively* go out towards that other and engage in what Hegel calls a *struggle-to-the-death*. The purpose of this going out to the other, and of the subsequent struggle that ensues, is to make self-consciousness possible by subduing the other.

Yet, whereas for Hegel each self tries to control the other self in order to maintain them as slaves, the centres of gravity I am describing here attempt the opposite. That is, they try to draw others *in* in order to secure more control over their identities. This is what a centre of gravity does and this necessary meeting of the other is what *dialogical* being-in-the-world consists of. In other words, the self needs to validate its own self by having other selves revolve, rotate and gravitate towards itself in order for them to meet.

II. David Chalmers and the *extended self*

The opening line in the paper “The extended mind” by Andy Clark and David Chalmers asks us to consider the following question: “Where does the mind stop and the rest of the world begin?” (Chalmers). Paraphrasing that question, I ask that we consider the following: Where does the self stop and the rest of the world begin? At the centre of the extended mind thesis is the claim that the mind does not stop at the skull and skin. By echoing Hegel’s dialectic, Chalmers states that,

In these cases, the human organism is linked with an external entity in a two-way interaction, creating a *coupled system* that can be seen as a cognitive system in its own right. All the components in the system play an active causal role, and they jointly govern behavior in the same sort of way that cognition usually does. If we remove the external component the system’s behavioural competence will drop, just as it

would if we removed part of its brain. Our thesis is that this sort of coupled process counts equally well as a cognitive process, whether or not it is wholly in the head (Chalmers)

out that it is wrong to suppose that one day neuroscientists will be able to say “That cell there, right in the middle of the hippocampus (or wherever)—that’s the self!” (Dennett, “The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity”). Clearly, if there is a self (and I contend that there is), it is not a *thing* located within the individual. The failure of the Cartesian project is the success of the *ESCG* project.

Alzheimer’s and amnesia are prime examples of why the Cartesian project fails to capture our understanding of personal identity. What these cases (Alzheimer’s and amnesia) have in common is that with them the individual has lost the ability to carry out the Cartesian project. In other words, she has lost the ability to introspect, to access her foundational self and actively affirm her identity. An

in order to form a coupled identity system that is akin to Chalmers` concept of the extended mind.

In order to illustrate the importance of the world in the shaping of our identities, it is useful to consider the following points: from the very start of our lives (at whatever point that may be) we are ‘constructed’ from the outside by the world, by the actions of others. Initially nothing comes from within the individual (echoing Sartre’s claim that ‘existence precedes essence’, we can affirm that ‘existence is equiprimordial with identity’). First, our genes are *given* by others and then they come together to form an *us*. These then determine, among other things, our ethnic identity, our physical appearance as well as (arguably) certain psychological traits or dispositions. Later on, our place of birth, city and/or country of residence, as well as our names and families are also given to us. All of these aspects—to simply name a few—are essential components of any claim to identity and yet none of them are created, found or dependent on any action by the individual. They are *not* private matters. Furthermore, while most of these aspects can be effectively changed and modified later on in life by the actions of the individual (consider plastic surgeries, legal name changes and others) what ca

intent is to deny the role of the others in the constitution of the self, such denial is only possible, as I just mentioned above, after the actions of others. Consequently, the world in which we always necessarily find ourselves in has a primordial and undeniable role in the shaping of our personal identities⁽⁶⁾.

Charles Taylor gives the world and the society in which we find ourselves in a crucial role in the formation of our identities. According to Taylor,

We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us. Even after we outgrow some of these others—our parents for instance—and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live (Taylor, *Politics of Recognition*)

of *virtual*, covert imitation). When we see another person cry, our mirror neurons activate *as if* we were crying. This is, the story goes, the origin of empathy. Yet, the claim I am making here is stronger than this. This sort of scientific reductionism is premised on the idea that the self is still essentially an atomistic individual that only later identifies with others—which is why the neuroscientific search for personal identity is focused and enclosed inside the *skull and skin* of an individual. However, I have argued that as selves we are essentially social and plural. Thus, our empathy is not to be explained by appealing to specific neural activity that is locked inside the individual, *underneath* the skin and skull. This would be an explanation of empathy that reduces it to mere identification with a separate *other*. Rather, I have argued that our empathy is to be explained by a specific way of *being-in-the-world* that necessarily entails the view of the *extended self* I have so far developed here. And, as we have seen, this view holds that 6(m)38(p)-5i goo opecl

gravity is able to exert more control over its identity—a process similar to the one that, as we saw above, Hegel described as a *struggle-to-the-death*.

Notes

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