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## The Beauty Within the Individuality of the Self

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### **BIOGRAPHY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Individuality (the self) encompasses a single point of view and is subjective. Each self has a specialized mental state which emerges out of conscious experience. While individuals could share experiences, no two selves could share all the same experiences nor could they ascribe the same representations to their experiences. Every self is authentic in that through one's identity, they can develop their own stance which serves as their inner voice. The self is complex due to the nature of identity. Through private conscious experiences one's identity develops which enables one to take an individual stance. This inner voice makes the self authentic and allows each person to ascribe different meanings to their experiences. Therefore, I propose that the self is beautiful due to its complexity which allows the self to be authentic. Beauty is a representation each self can ascribe to things based on prior experiences. The first-person perspective which is a defining characteristic of an individual allows each person to have a distinct way of perceiving beauty. I believe that the self is beautiful due to its individualistic nature. The body projects our appearance into the world, and the self emerges out of the body. The mystery of the self and the meanings one ascribes to their experiences is extraordinarily beautiful.

### **KEYWORDS**

Individuality, Authenticity, Conscious-Experiences, Aesthetics, Language, Representations

What does it mean to be a self? No two humans are alike; each human is individually unique. Although identical twins may have the same physical characteristics, this does not mean that they share the same experiences. These different experiences make each unique in that each will attribute different meanings to their experiences. If we take the self to be a collection of unique experiences and perspectives, then the representations that this specific self ascribes to their experiences cannot be fully understood by other individuals. The mystery of the self, and the meaning (representations) that the self ascribes to their experiences is inherently beautiful.

As a non-reductive materialist, I believe that while the self and the body coexist, they are distinct; the self cannot be reduced to physical properties. Since the self is subjective and the body is objective, these entities cannot be explained using the same mechanisms despite their coexistence. I will argue that the self cannot be reduced to physical properties. Let it be clear that I do not identify as a dualist. I do not believe that the self is anything more than the body it arises out of. Without the body, you cannot have the self.

## **I. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE SELF AND BODY**

I propose that the self is subjective. The self consists of a person's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. The self will be explained through the mind, a component of the self. Mental states, which are subcomponents of the self can be defined as having a sense of what it is like "to be that organism" (Nagel 1974, 436). This sense can only be described by the individual that is this organism. A mental state is an "inward cognitive [perspective] that is specialized for each individual" (Metzinger 2003). This means that an individual's mental state is private and cannot be directly accessed by others. Therefore, mental states consist of a "subjective phenomenon" that is associated with a single point of view (Nagel 1974, 437). I agree that if the self is subjective, then it consists of a single point of view.

For a conscious experience to exist, there must be "something it feels like to be the subject of our thoughts, actions, and perceptions" (Prinz 2011, 147). In other words, a self must have a sense of what it is like to be who they are to have conscious experiences. While individuals could share common experiences with each other, I believe that no individual can possess all the same conscious experiences as another, because each individual has a private single point of

view. Therefore, if the self is subjective, then each person has their own conscious experiences that no other individual can completely possess.

If the self consists of a single point of view, this means that we are restricted to the information within our own minds which does not allow us to understand "what it is like to be" anyone besides our self (Nagel 1974, 438). Consider a dog for example. While we do have information that could help us predict how a dog might behave, this does not mean that we know what it is like to be a dog. Due to the informational restrictions within our minds, we are unable to understand wholly what it is like to be this dog. Additionally, because we do not have the same conscious experiences as this dog, we do not pay attention to the same information, and we therefore cannot know what it is like to be this dog. The single point of view that the mental self operates on restricts the amount of information that we absorb. It is physically impossible for an individual to take in all information that exists in the world. There are conscious experiences that we have through which our brains "interact with the environment" to produce experiences that we are unaware of (Metzinger 2003). Experience is not objective like the objective information our world portrays. Experience is subjective, because we attribute representations to these experiences which therefore gives these experiences subjective meaning. This results in a single subjective self which no other self can fully understand.

In contrast, I believe that the body is objective. Let us consider the brain (body). The organization of the human brain "is more complex than any other system in the universe: yet its basic ingredients are...simple" (Zeman 2008). The body is objective in that the science of the body "remains just that, a science... it works with concepts that have been carefully defined in terms of observations that anyone, with the right expertise and equipment, can make-concepts like... synapses" for the brain (Zeman 2008). If the body is objective, then it is not limited to the first-person point of view. This means that "anyone, with the right expertise" can fully understand the objective physiological processes that occur within the body (Zeman 2008). If the body is not limited by its point of view, we are not restricted by information. In this case, information we receive from the world is accessible for us to use.

## II. IS ROBUST SUBJECTIVITY SUFFICIENT FOR SELF-AWARENESS?

In order for an individual to have a subjective and private point of view, the individual must be able to identify themselves as being themselves (Zahavi 2002). Once one can determine that they are themselves and are therefore distinct from other entities, they have self-awareness which allows them to experience the world (Zahavi 2002). This determination is made possible through "the linguistic ability to attribute...first-person reference to oneself" (Baker 2000 cited in Zahavi 2002, 10). The capacity of self-awareness develops over the course of one's life through "concepts and language" that they are exposed to (Zahavi 2002, 10).

I propose that while the self is subjective in that individuals have a unique sense of what it is like "to be that organism", one cannot be a self without being inducted into a language (Nagel 1974, 436). Individuals rely on language to connect them to the world and others. It is only through acquiring the language where children can gain knowledge from the world through other individuals. If one can only be a self by acquiring a language, then an integral part of being a self is being connected to others who teach us this language. The only way for us to learn a word is "through my and others' experience of these being objects for us, in some common space" (Taylor 1989). One day children will be equipped with vocabulary that they have experienced which can be utilized to explain to others what they are thinking about. This means that information we receive from the world is accessible for us to use. An individual's "perception involves co-perception of self and of environment" (Gibson 1979 cited in Zahavi 2002, 11). The experiences we have in the world allow us to gain knowledge through which we acquire new words to add to our mental dictionary (the mind). This knowledge we gain from the world does not solely manifest in the mind (a component of the self). We can outwardly project the knowledge we have gained through linguistic descriptions. For example, by describing what an apple looks like, one is projecting to the world that they have knowledge about an apple. Through language, we can put into words the experiences we have, and inform others about the information we have gained. Without language, we would have no way to identify ourselves as our interaction with the world and others is "essential to... achieving self definition" (Taylor 1989).

### III. DISTINGUISHING PERSPECTIVE FROM POINT OF VIEW

Within the discussion of inner cognitive functions, perspective and point of view could be taken synonymously, however, the distinction between the two is conceptually important. Perspective and representations in this context mean the same thing. Through information we absorb from the world (through our experiences), we are exposed to vocabulary which we can use to describe our experiences. We use this vocabulary gained from previous experiences to ascribe representations to an experience that we are explaining. These representations are generated through vocabulary which must be within our cognitive capacity to be utilized. "All knowledge [that we absorb from the world] is perspectival in character" (Searle 1998). This means that knowledge is assessed through a framework in which individuals use conceptual resources (vocabulary) to describe their inner mental states to the world (Searle 1998). This vocabulary can be shared with others, and thus many individuals could use the same representations to describe their experiences. Where point of view comes into play, is that an individual can actively choose which representations (perspectives) they ascribe to their experiences. Perspectivism is "always mediated by point of view" (Searle 1998). While an individual can develop many perspectives through vocabulary, these perspectives are mediated when an individual chooses which perspectives to ascribe to their experiences by executing their singular point of view. Should this approach be executed, an individual could develop their own voice through which they could explain to others what their experiences mean to them. Individuals can have many perspectives, but they can only have one point of view. No matter how hard one tries, it is impossible for them to portray all the information depicted in the world. This means that we are restricted to the information within our own minds which does not allow us to understand "what it is like to be" anyone besides our self (Nagel 1974, 438). No individual absorbs the same information as someone else. We could utilize the perspectives one uses to explain their experiences to better understand the person, but these perspectives only serve as a guide to help us predict things about this individual. We do not have access to all the information this individual has access to, and therefore, we cannot fully understand what it is like to be this individual.

#### **IV. THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPERIENCE AND THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE**

For thoughts to be represented through the use of language, we must first experience the thing that we are trying to describe. For example, for me to describe what a dog is to someone, I first need to experience a dog for myself. Before representations can be explained to another person using language, we have non-linguistic representations that privately exist in our minds. These non-linguistic representations are registered neurophysiologically in that one is privately aware of them; however, these representations cannot be expressed linguistically to others. I argue that if the self consists of a single point of view, then each person is subject to their own conscious experiences.

A conscious experience is defined as “something it feels like to be the subject of our thoughts, actions, and perceptions” (Prinz 2011, 147). While individuals could share common experiences with each other, I believe that no individual can possess all the same conscious experiences as another due to each individual having a subjective point of view. Therefore, if the self is subjective, then each person has their own conscious experiences that no other individual can completely possess. If the self consists of a single point of view, this means that we are restricted to the information within our own mind which does not allow us to understand “what it is like to be” anyone besides our self (Nagel 1974, 438). Experience is not objective like the objective information our world portrays. Because we attribute representations to our experiences, these experiences have subjective meaning. To have an experience “means that there is something ‘it is like’ for the subject to have that experience” (Zahavi 2002, 14). This likeness of the experience is only possible if one is aware “of the experience itself” (Flanagan 1992 cited in Zahavi 2002, 14).

Both self-awareness and experience are necessary for “subjectivity [to] reveal itself” to an individual (Zahavi 2002, 13). For example, I am self-aware when I am conscious of my perception of a bird in a tree. When an experience is presented in this manner, this experience becomes my subjective experience of which I am self-aware of. An individual has a subjective first-person perspective of the things they are experiencing. First person perspective is distinct from third-person perspective in that through first-person perspective, “we are acquainted with

our own subjectivity in a way that differs radically from the way in which we are acquainted with objects" (Zahavi 2002, 14).

## **V. THE COEXISTENCE BETWEEN THE SELF AND THE BODY**

While I believe that the self (subjective) and the body (objective) are distinct, I argue that the self and body coexist. The body can be explained in objective terms such as through a chemical state which in turn can "provoke changes in mental state" (Gazzaniga 1988). If the mind (self) and the brain (body) depend on each other in order to exist, then they must therefore influence each other. "Since the mind is derived from brain tissue, the state of brain tissue ought to affect the mind" and vice versa (Gazzaniga 1988). This finding supports my claim that if the self and body influence each other, they must coexist.

## **VI. THE DISTINCTION IN MECHANISMS THAT DEFINE THE SELF AND THE BODY**

While the self and the body coexist, because the self and the body cannot be explained using the same mechanisms, the self is distinct from the body and therefore cannot be explained objectively, nor can it be reduced to objective terms that define the body. Recall that the self is subjective. If the self is subjective, then it embodies a single point of view. Additionally, if the self has a single point of view, then objective (materialism) cannot explain the self. I agree with Nagel when he states that "it is useless to base the defense of materialism on any analysis of mental phenomena", because materialism does not deal with the subjective nature of mental phenomena (Nagel 1974, 437). Therefore, if the self is subjective, then objective (materialism) terms cannot be used to explain the self, nor can the self be reduced to objective (physical) terms that describe the body. Because the objective terminology used to explain the body cannot be used to explain the self, the self and the body cannot be explained in the same mechanisms and are therefore distinct from each other.

## VII. THE EMERGENCE OF THE SELF OUT OF THE BODY AND PROJECTION

If the self and the body are distinct, then the self can emerge out of the body. This does not mean that the mind (self) can exist without the brain, but rather that the mind "can have emergent properties that become active in guiding the workings of the [body] that gave rise to them" (Gazzaniga 1988). "The emergent properties of the brain [body], the operating rules of the system we call the mind [self], can push information around...[so] that the actual functioning of the nerves can be influenced by what the mind does" (Gazzaniga 1988). While the self and the body coexist, the body is what projects our appearance into the world. "We know the self only through phenomena" which is directed outward facing the world (Prinz 2011, 148). This unique identity is shaped through the experiences we gain which allows us to develop our sense of self. As Metzinger states, "consciousness is the appearance of a world...if you are conscious, a world appears to you" (Metzinger 2009). Through this world, we appear, because our self emerges from the body. "Consciousness is a very special phenomenon, because it is part of the world, and contains it at the same time" (Metzinger 2009). Our body is a part of the world, and through our sense of self we can contain this world. Through consciousness, "a reality appear[s] within itself. It creates inwardness; the life process has become aware of itself" (Metzinger 2009). It is this sense of inwardness, the single point of view of the self that makes the self and body distinct. Through the self, we can be consciously aware of objects in the world by perceiving them through our own lens. For example, as Merleau-Ponty states, "it is not the contingent aspects of my bodily make-up...which force me to see the surroundings vaguely if I want to see the object clearly. Even if I knew nothing of rods and cones...to look at an object is to plunge oneself into it" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 24). "In other words: to look at an object is to inhabit it" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 24). Through this process, the self gazes at an object, and makes perceptions based on the way they view the object. We can view objects, because they "form a system [of our] world" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 25). If we choose to pay attention to objects, then we can make our own individual perceptions of them. This is what it means for the self to have a conscious experience: when "a single and unified reality becomes present" to an individual (Metzinger 2009). Conscious experience is an internal affair that is subjective, meaning that each person's conscious experiences are



private. Because the body is an object, it projects shadows onto the wall of the world. The body gives us our appearance in the world, and the self emerges from the body therefore activating conscious experience. "Our conscious experience of the world is systematically externalized because the brain constantly creates the experience that I am present in a world outside my brain" (Metzinger 2009). Our thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and "bodily sensations" are all "integrated into the self model" (Metzinger 2009). Through this inward perspective, the self can form perceptions about anything, and no other individual can fully understand this perception, because they do not have the same self that emerges out of the body and into the world. Therefore, because the self and body are distinct, the self emerges out of the body.

Let us explore what is meant by no individual having the same conscious experience. Consider an individual who is unable to identify facial expressions. While this individual can study all the intricate details of a face, they cannot identify the face as a whole and do not recognize who the face they are studying belongs to. Someone who has no neurological trouble with identifying faces and expressions would have a completely different experience interacting with people than this individual would. Because a person would not have the same conscious experiences as this individual described above, they could use information to predict how the individual described would behave, however, this does not mean that they know what it is like to be this person. If the person described above and a random person were asked to both explain what the same face looked like, their responses would be completely different, due to their diversity in experiences. This diversity in experiences allows each self the ability to maintain their own sense of identity through the conscious experiences they are exposed to.

## **VIII. THE BODY, PERCEPTIONS, AND SUBJECTIVITY**

For us to experience objects in relation to ourselves, our bodies perform necessary movements (Zahavi 2002). There is a relationship between perception and bodily movements in that I "can only perceive and use objects if [I am] a body" (Zahavi 2002, 19). This means that if I know the position of an object relative to my subjective self, then I can pick up this object. My perception of the object must contain some information about myself, so that I can act on it (Zahavi 2002). For example, when I am aware of my interaction with a pencil, I can

then use this pencil to write. When I experience a door and its position from me, I am self-aware of the relationship between my personal perception of the door and its existence in the world. The body is “present in every project and in every perception” (Zahavi 2002, 21). Our body is a part of the world, and through our sense of self we can contain this world. The body allows us to exist in the world as an entity that others are physically aware of. Through the body, I can perceive objects using my first-person perspective. By existing in the world, the body “is present...as myself” (Zahavi 2002, 21). Therefore, the self and the body present my subjective self to the world which is different from any other self.

## **IX. INDIVIDUALITY AND THE AUTHENTIC SELF**

In order to understand what it means to have a sense of self the concept of individuality must also be explained. Individuality is “thoroughly determined from or by the totality of its logical, historical, social, and psychic conditions” (Heller et al. 1987). Individuality is subjective. What I mean by this, is that “individuality... withdraws from...objectification” (Heller et al. 1987). Individuality encompasses a single point of view and is subjective in that “each [person] carries a productive uniqueness within... the core of his being” (Heller et al. 1987). This means that no other person can attribute the same representations that this individual has to their own personal experiences. The individual’s sense of self is inaccessible to all others due to the restriction of access to information within our minds.

There is something beautiful about being an individual. This beauty is known as authenticity which gives individuals their own sense of being in this world. Authenticity can be defined as “each of us [having] an original way of being” (Taylor 1992). Authenticity and individuality are directly correlated in that “there is a certain way of being human that is *my way*. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else’s” (Taylor 1992). Through our original point of view, “each of our voices has something of its own to say” (Taylor 1992). By listening to our inner voice, we maintain our unique identity through which we can discover ourselves. The self-discovery of an individual “passes through a creation, the making of something original...[and the individual] become[s]” what they have in them to be themselves (Taylor 1992). This understanding of what it means to be this self is ineffable to all others. This means that the self has a single point of view, and conscious experiences that no other person can possess.

## **X. MENTAL REPRESENTATIONS AND THE SELF**

If the self consists of a single point of view, then each person is subject to their own conscious experiences. If each person is subject to their own conscious experiences, I argue that everyone is authentic in that no person can ascribe the same mental representations to their experiences. Mental representations can be defined as “a process by which some biosystems generate an internal depiction of parts of reality” (Metzinger 2003). Mental representations are internal states through which an individual can ascribe meaning to their experiences. “This content can only be accessed in a special process” “because the causal properties making it available for conscious experience are only realized by a single person” (Metzinger 2003). This means that the self has a private point of view which no one else has access to. Therefore, if the self has a single point of view, then each individual is authentic in that no person can ascribe the same mental representations to their experiences.

To better conceptualize this, let us refer to mental representations as aesthetics. Aesthetics in a broad sense is the appreciation of beauty by an individual. One example of aesthetics is taste which can be defined as “the capacity of appraising the beautiful” (Cohen & Guyer 1982). Taste is an aesthetic judgement that individuals use to choose what they consider beautiful. Through taste, an individual can use their imagination and ascribe mental representations based on their experiences to describe what is beautiful to them. Beauty can be appraised by reflecting on “a plurality of representations with one another in relation to a concept” (Cohen & Guyer 1982). These representations must be within an individual’s cognitive capacity, meaning that they must have experienced this concept before to ascribe representations to it. I believe that while beauty emerges out of a biochemical material (the body), beauty itself is not materialistic. Beauty is a representation that individuals can ascribe to an object based on prior experiences. I believe that each individual ascribes a different meaning to what they find beautiful. Beauty in this case is meaning. Individuals can describe meaning (beauty) to people, places and things based on their personal experiences. The information that individuals choose to take in depends on the experiences they have encountered which shapes the way in which they ascribe representations (meaning) to objects, people, or situations. Therefore, because no two individuals

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can share the same experiences and point of view, no one can ascribe the same mental representations to things that they encounter.

Consider an individual whose visual experiences may differ from your own. This individual has good “visual acuity” “in that they have no difficulty seeing a pin on the floor, though sometimes [they] missed [an object] if it was placed to [their] left” (Sacks 1985). In addition, this individual has no problem explaining minute details in a painting such as color, brightness, and shapes, however, they fail to see the painted scene as a whole. Would this individual say that the painting is beautiful in the way that you would? In other words, would they ascribe the same mental representations to this painting as you would? Because this person has unique experiences that no one else possesses (including yourself), they would not describe the painting the same way as you, nor would they attribute the same mental representations (beauty) to this painting as you would. This means that both of you have a different idea based on past experiences of what beauty is, and the mental representations you attribute to this painting cannot be understood by anyone else because they do not have all of the same experiences of beauty as you. This is why beauty is ineffable. No other individual could ever fully understand the individual’s reasoning behind why they find something beautiful. Beauty is subjective in that the representations of beauty that individuals ascribe to an object are dependent on the experiences of an individual.

## **XI. AESTHETIC THEORY AND OBJECTIVITY**

Recall that aesthetics is the appreciation of beauty by an individual. When one engages in this practice, this “involves deployment of a certain amount of theory” through which an individual becomes aware of what they are observing (Kraut 2007). To reflect on an experience, one must engage in a higher-order thought process that involves both semantic and syntactic theory (Kraut 2007). This theory is subject to inquiry which through reflection an individual can improve and better explain. Through syntactic theory, an individual could use vocabulary to ascribe representations to a painting they are observing, and through semantic theory, an individual could determine what this painting means to them. Think of aesthetic theories in terms of the purpose of a dictionary. Just as dictionaries “encode information” to describe the majority view of an object or entity within the world, theories seek to describe, codify, and to articulate an experience one

is engaging in (Kraut 2007). Through aesthetic theories, individuals can ascribe representations to a painting that they are observing, however, aesthetic theories do not seek to legitimize. Individuals using aesthetic theory have the right to their own opinion of the work they are observing despite whether others view the work to be beautiful. This opinion (which is neither true nor false because aesthetic theory does not legitimize) is simply a stance one takes given something they are experiencing. One does not need to have experienced this painting before to call it beautiful, they must simply have vocabulary from prior experiences at their disposal to choose which representations they want to ascribe to this painting. Through language, individuals can justify the reason behind why they described a painting they experienced in a certain way, but language is the only way this person's views of the painting could be projected to the world. Language is an imperfect form of communication. While language may connect us to others, it also distances us due to the restrictions we all have when it comes to accessing knowledge of the world. While individuals have the right to their opinions regarding a piece of art, the artworld is also subject to objectivity. "Objectivity is the feature that marks the contrast between what is in the world and what is not" (Kraut 2007). There is a sense in the artworld that there is a "standard of correctness" for how to interpret a piece of art" (Kraut 2007). However, aesthetic theory is not concerned with the correctness of these interpretations. Aesthetic theory is a reflective way that individuals can determine the kind of meaning that experiencing a specific entity has for them. The beauty that individuals find in entities cannot be directly accessed by others due to the inability of language to capture all the knowledge that exists in the world.

"What it is to be a self ([an individual]) is difficult to conceive" (Taylor 1989). The mystery behind the understanding of the self makes each individual beautiful. The self is complex due to the nature of identity. Identity "fundamentally orientates" oneself in the world and provides a framework through which one can determine "what is good...or what [they]...oppose". Identity "is the horizon within which [one is] capable of taking a stand" (Taylor 1989). Knowing where we stand helps us determine "what meaning things have for us" (Taylor 1989). Taking a stand allows one to construct an inner voice, maintain their identity, and create their authentic way of being. "We are not selves in the way that we are organisms...We are living beings with these organs quite independently of our self...-interpretations, or the meanings things have for us" (Taylor 1989). The body projects our appearance

into the world (us as organisms), and the self (interpretations) emerges out of the body. "One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it" (Taylor 1989). We are present in the world while still being outside of it at the same time. "Our conscious experience of the world is systematically externalized because the brain constantly creates the experience that I am present in a world outside my brain" (Metzinger 2009). Through these conscious experiences, we develop an inward perspective that no other individual can fully understand simply because they do not have the same emergent properties. The mystery of the self and the meanings that the self ascribes to their experiences is extraordinarily beautiful.

## **XII. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

This paper points us in the direction of additional areas to explore for future work. Within the scope of this work I emphasize that the first-person perspective which is a defining characteristic of an individual allows each person to have a distinct way of perceiving beauty. From this I conclude that the self is beautiful due to its individualistic nature. I recognize that further research could be helpful in explaining why having a distinct first-person perspective causes the self to become beautiful. I also state that the self is complex due to the nature of identity. Through private conscious experiences one's identity develops through which one can take an individual stance. This inner voice makes the self authentic and allows each person to ascribe different meanings to their experiences. Therefore, I propose that the self is beautiful due to its complexity which allows the self to be authentic. Further research is needed to demonstrate what makes complexity beautiful for the claim regarding the self being beautiful to be strengthened. Future research could highlight a potential opposing view to my claim that the self is beautiful due to its individuality. I acknowledge that others may find the self to be beautiful for reasons other than its individuality, and I hope to address this view in my future work.

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