

Introduction

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The self is notoriously elusive. It is not something to be encountered like other things in the world. Rather, it provides the very perspective or standpoint from which any such encounter with other things can take place. Accordingly, our ordinary ways of thinking about the world and its objects are ill-suited to articulating the peculiar status and function of the self. Not surprisingly, then, philosophical elucidations of the self have been the point of origin for new ways of thinking not only about the self but also about all the other things from which the self is to be differentiated and to which it is yet intimately related. This holds equally for past attempts, such as Descartes' introduction of the *cogito* as the ultimate foundation of certainty in knowledge, and contemporary efforts in philosophy of mind, such as the semantics of indexical self-reference.

A particularly intriguing way of thinking about the self can be found in the work of Immanuel Kant and his successors, the German idealists. In the decades around 1800, these philosophers developed detailed and varied theories that place the self at the very center of philosophical reflection. The classical German way of thinking about the self is characterized by a decidedly idealist bent. The self is understood not only as the ground of all knowledge concerning the world, but also as the ground of the very reality of the world. The idealist extension of the self's original, epistemological function to a larger, metaphysical role made it imperative to develop a specific terminology that addressed the radical, world-constituting function of the self. The absoluteness of the self as the universal condition of reality was expressed by such constructs as "subject," "subject-object," and "spirit."

Two hundred years after its inception, the German idealist thinking about the self is both a source of embarrassment and a challenge. The unabashed

idealist stance of the German idealists has found virtually no followers in contemporary philosophy, and even leads to revisionist, nonmetaphysical readings of the classical German authors themselves. And yet the sustained reflection on the structure of the self that is to be found in Kant and his successors remains an important point of orientation and inspiration for historically informed attempts at a theory of human selfhood.

Much of the recent attempts to retrieve classical German thinking about the self for contemporary philosophy of mind have originated in the work of the German philosopher Dieter Henrich and a number of his associates, most prominently among them Manfred Frank. In works like theirs, historical research into the exceedingly difficult central arguments of Kant and his idealist successors is carried out in a spirit at once critical and appreciative. Moreover, the reconstruction and assessment of classical German theories about the self has been increasingly informed by related discussions in analytic philosophy of mind, thus contributing to an emerging dialogue between different historical periods and philosophical traditions.

The essays in the present volume partake in this ongoing project of reintroducing classical German thinking about the self into contemporary philosophical discussion. They provide the English-speaking reader with a survey of the main issues and positions to be found in German thinking about the self around 1800, while also introducing a contemporary perspective on the historical material. The essays present, discuss, and assess accounts of the self in the main philosophical authors of the period. In addition to the primary figures—Kant, Schelling, and Hegel—some of the lesser-known participants in the debate on the self receive critical attention, among them the philosophical theologian Schleiermacher and the poets Hölderlin and Novalis. In disciplinary terms, the accounts of the self covered span a broad range of areas, from metaphysics and epistemology through ethics, political and social philosophy to aesthetics and philosophy of religion. The volume as a whole thus provides a detailed and comprehensive introduction to the philosophy of German idealism through the focus of the theory of the self.

The essays are organized under three headings, each of them addressing a key concept for figuring the self in classical German philosophy. Part One examines the role of the self as the subject underlying our experience of the world. Manfred Frank carefully distinguishes between the fact that selves have consciousness of their very being (“subjectivity”) and the fact that selves are unique and not interchangeable (“individuality”). Frank places the Kantian and post-Kantian discussion of the self into the larger context of modern and contemporary thinking about mind and consciousness. Richard Aquila provides a detailed reading of Kant’s account of the subject of mental activity. Aquila stresses the proximity of Kant’s doctrine of inner sense to a nonmetaphysical theory of the soul. Karl Ameriks surveys the recent interpretations of

Kant's theory of mind. Ameriks's critical assessment focuses on readings of Kant that draw on the work of Fichte. Günter Zöllner presents Fichte's transcendental theory of consciousness and self-consciousness. Zöllner's emphasis is on the methodological requirements for an adequate account of the subjectivity of the I.

Part Two examines the dependence of the self on some ultimate, absolute ground. Dieter Henrich argues for the role of metaphysical thinking in our understanding of the self and its place in the world. He focuses on the close connection between the self-relation expressed in the first-person singular pronoun, "I," and the pure self-relation of the absolute developed by Hegel. Jane Kneller examines the accounts of selfhood that can be found in the novels of Hölderlin and Novalis. In these literary conceptions of selfhood, Kneller detects a critique of Fichte's theory of self-consciousness and a return to Kant's agnosticism about the ultimate nature and origin of the self. Richard Velkley discusses the relation between self and nature in Schelling's theory of art. His focus is on the philosophical potential of art and on the role of the self as artistic genius. David Klemm presents Schleiermacher's theory of mind, according to which the unity of the thinking self and the willing self lies in immediate self-consciousness or feeling. Klemm concentrates on Schleiermacher's theological interpretation of immediate self-consciousness as both an empirical feeling and a transcendental cognition of the utter dependence of the self-positing "I" on an absolute ground he calls "God."

Part Three is concerned with the mutual dependence of self and others. Walter Jaeschke clarifies Hegel's complex position on the nature and value of subjectivity. He argues that Hegel's critique of the principle of subjectivity in modern philosophy and romantic thought is entirely compatible with Hegel's own conception of the infinite subject as mediated with its own other. Jeffrey Hoover compares the accounts of ownership in Schleiermacher and Hegel. Hoover shows how social and economic relations with other selves are part of the concrete realization of the self. John Durham Peters examines Hegel's account of symbolic interaction through language. Peters reads Hegel's treatment of self-consciousness and spirit as providing a theory of communication between selves. David Stern traces the Kantian heritage of the accounts of selfhood in Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Stern diagnoses a continued presence of Kant's emphasis on the active and structuring function of the self.

Earlier versions of ten of the twelve essays collected here were presented at a conference on the classical German theory of the self that was held at the University of Iowa under the title *Figuring the Self* on April 9–11, 1992. The conference was sponsored by the Department of Philosophy, the School of Religion, and the Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry at the University of Iowa, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The

conference was in turn the culminating event of a semester-long Scholars Workshop, directed by the editors of the present volume, and supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities under the auspices of the Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry at the University of Iowa.

The two essays not originally presented at the Iowa conference, by Manfred Frank and Dieter Henrich, were included in order to provide some of the German context for the work of the American-based scholars represented in this volume. Frank's essay was published originally under the title "Subjektivität und Individualität: Überblick über eine Problemlage," in *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbsterkenntnis* (© 1991 Philipp Reclam jun. GmbH & Co., Stuttgart). Henrich's essay, originally entitled "Selbstbewußtsein und spekulatives Denken," was written for the French journal *Critique* and thus with a French audience in mind. It subsequently appeared in *Fluchtlinien: Philosophische Essays* (© Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt am Main 1982). The two essays were translated by Günter Zöllner and appear here with the kind cooperation of the authors and the permission of the publishers.

The pieces by Frank and Henrich exemplify two main positions in current German thinking about the self. Frank contrasts the semantic and epistemological orientation of the account of selfhood in analytic philosophy of mind with the constitutive role of understanding and interpretation in self-conscious individuals as emphasized by the hermeneutical tradition. By contrast, Henrich draws on the tradition of Hegelian metaphysics and portrays the self as transcending the natural world and its ontology of individuality altogether, relating it instead to the absolute conceived as mediated self-relation. While Frank suggests a complementary relation between Continental and analytic thinking on the mind, Henrich radically challenges the naturalism underlying virtually all current accounts of mind and self.

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Following the lead of the Iowa conference, an international conference on the self in German philosophy was held at the University of Notre Dame in April 1994. A volume with papers from that gathering, edited by Karl Ameriks

and Dieter Sturma, has since appeared under the title *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). That volume contains two further pieces by Manfred Frank along with essays by German and American scholar-philosophers and includes a bibliography.