

The Self (Intensive Adjective or Being) Authentic, Hiding or Material?

- King: They are trying to strip us from all that we have inside.
- Slave: You're right. It is somewhat like the story of the 'The Emperor's New Clothes' by Snah NaitSirhc Nesredna.
- K: You mean by Hans Christian Andersen.
- S: Yes, but I was trying to shorten the conversational moves I need to make.
- K: I do not understand.
- S: Majesty, you cannot not understand. I am the one who stands under you.
- K: Well said. But go back to what we were talking before.
- [S: (only to the reader): Hi out there, pay attention, he does not get it yet. The under-stand ... like in standing under (to take upon oneself), you know?!]
- S: It is similar in that they are stripping us from something but it is not that there are no clothes to the king outside, as in the well-known story, but inside.
- K: Are they saying we are naked inside?
- S: They seem to be saying there is nothing but what there is ... body and stuff. Materiality. There is nothing inside. No self, no mind, you have it; inside, we are naked.
- K: Heretics! That's what they are.

S: Indeed! They choose a different side (heretic from Greek *αἰρετικός* able to choose); they maintain opinions that are different from those generally received or considered authoritative.

K: They are just denying the truth!

S: Oh master, truth must be left for later. We need first to save our-selves!

K: Yes, but what is it about that weird name you used as the author of ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’?

S: Read it backwards your majesty and you’ll under-stand!

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And what about the *self*, then? Another word we take for granted though if asked to define it, we might find it difficult to do so. It seems to belong to a family of words that try to construct the human, on the one hand, as a unity, as an individual (more specifically the one inside as in the last chapter) as separate, as sufficiently complete all in itself. Yet, on the other hand, this same self creates again a duality—the individual outside the bodily, the material, and the one inside, the immaterial but more ‘real’. This second one is ‘hidden’ (like the homunculus) from the eye, available only to those able to say ‘we know’ ‘we see what others do not, even that which is not seen by the individuals alluded to themselves’. Yet, the weapons of the powerful become, at times, the weapons of the weak. Thus, we can also hear the weakest individuals involved in unequal power relations saying to the more powerful, ‘it was not my true self who reacted to you in this manner’ (though in the case of the weak it could be interpreted as a smart strategic statement). As incomprehensible as these statements may sound, they are part of our daily rhetoric.

Think about someone speaking about someone else’s ‘self’, ascribing adjectives such as authentic or true. This educator or adult (police officer or interrogator) could say, for example, that the child did or did not do something on purpose or could wonder about the authenticity of this or that other behavior. In any case, we would be dealing again with the dual assumptions of the self/I. In both cases, the duality stands, but it is only assumed. It is assumed that somewhere ‘inside’ there is an authentic or true self that for some reason is hiding and appears only at certain times. How much sense does this make? This should make us wonder, when we make such claims and what these claims do in our everyday lives, that is,

what consequences do they have? When do we need to mention we did something intentionally or not ... to/with whom ... under which circumstances? Intentions (from Latin *in-tendere*—*in*-adv. and prep with the senses ‘into, in, within; on, upon; towards, against’ *tendere* to stretch, to direct one’s course, one’s steps, to proceed in any direction), or lack of them, are mentioned at points in the interaction when there is doubt or ambiguity about the meaning constructed concerning a certain event.

Consider, for example, someone who has mainly experienced obedience by someone else in the past, stating to that person ‘I know, you did not really mean what you said’; as if there would be meaning other than in the words said—a real or true meaning ‘inside’ the speaker or somewhere inside the word, a meaning that is somehow ‘hiding’ or not immediately available. One wonders what available evidence we have for making such claims, as if there was an ‘inner’ self-unavailable to us at times (for reasons we don’t always ‘understand’, yet we seem to know that this duality exists), and we keep struggling to reconcile this duality between inner and outside selves.

We are sure you have heard also someone say something like ‘I did not mean this’ or ‘I did not do this on purpose’. For example, when someone was hit by a ball that I threw and it was not clear if I had specifically directed (remember intention above) the ball towards him or not. In such case, a short statement such as ‘sorry, I did not do it on purpose’ will help clarify the event and its consequences. The ‘I’ in these sentences seems to stand for the ‘self’. Not just the self but the ‘real’ self. As if the things that I have done (e.g., ‘cheat’ in an exam, or hit someone) were done by mistake or not intentionally and mostly by somebody else. But what does this mean? Does this mean that there are two sides of an action? The action itself and the intention of the action? How could something be done without intention? Or why should intention be part of any action? It seems that we hold to a dual perspective (yet again) in which the one is really two. There is ‘I’ the body and another ‘I’ inside. One of them, the body, does the thing, and the other, the one inside, has (or not) the intention. Again, we are afraid that neurosurgeons cannot attest to the existence of the little ‘I/self’ inside, the one who intends or the one who acts or not, on purpose.

You might be wondering by now, what does this talk have to do with education? Let’s go back to the examples mentioned earlier and contextualize them in schools and classrooms. In educational events, we might hear statements such as ‘I did not intend to cheat in the exam’ or when a

teacher sees a rather low achiever find the proper solution to a difficult math exercise, we might hear him say to a colleague ‘well ... yes the answer is correct but I’m not sure s/he really understands how to do it’. A difficult statement indeed, for it seems to imply (assuming the student had worked and found the solution by himself, alone) there are two ways to do things: one mechanical done by the body (the hand writing on the pad), and one thoughtful conducted by the mind or the self. As if there is a little ‘I’, the homunculus, whispering to the body (for him to direct the hand as in the Cartesian theatre) or directly to the hand what to write or how to find a solution to the math problem. This, of course, raises multiple other issues related as before to who holds the power, who has the right to say to somebody whether he or she really understands or does not—not by the way he is doing it, which is accessible to the senses, but by his assumptions of what goes on ‘inside’ the doer’s head.

Then there are those instances in which the self, the ‘I’ (inside) and his/ her wishes/goals/aspirations and the like are the reason for what the bodily ‘I’ does. We seem not to be able to make peace with the idea that things just get done when they get done. We seem always to be after the reasons for the doings—the whys of the doings. What does this imply? What sort of idea is ‘hiding’ behind that doing? It seems to imply again that the doing itself is not enough; a why has to be found. But is this ‘why’ looked for in all doings? The truth is that it is not, which again brings us to ask about the when, the with whom, the circumstances we find ourselves inclined to ask about the reasons, the whys, for the doings. Again pay attention that we seem to have a preference for the hidden, the ‘true self’ and their reasons, their whys rather than for what is available to us as the product of their doings.

There is one place (also an educational one) where questions about intentions make some sense. In the courthouse, talk about intention takes place, and at times a lot, yet in the courthouse, evidence comes always first and assumed intentions are only secondary and applicable in case evidence is not available; in schools and education we seem to work the other way round.

Thus there is a tendency to often privilege the ‘why’ questions in schools, because we seem to believe that there is something hidden ‘inside’ (a self or a group of selves), and we seek to find the reasons or rationale ‘behind’ this. This choice though has consequences, because privileging ‘why’ questions takes educators and students further away from ‘how’ questions. The latter questions emphasize an exploration of the processes

of doing things, that is, the happenings of events rather than ascribing a particular logic that is supposedly hidden until someone ‘discovers’ it. The ‘how’ questions aim at telling a (hi)story, rather than whether there is a particular line of reasoning corresponding to truth conditions. In short, as Deleuze would have it, the how questions speak the event, not the essence or the thing (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014). Could it be we should speak about a certain reversal back in the seventeenth century in which self was understood as ‘Anti-Christ and Anti-God in the world’ (see Chap. 2) to today’s understanding of self as ‘Anti-scientific and Anti-logical in the world’?

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- King: They are firing at everything we believe in. At the very essence of what we are.
- Slave: King, you are *you*, you have nothing to worry about.
- K: If I was only what I am, I would be the same as you.
- S: Well, you are.
- K: No, I’m not, I’m a king!
- S: Yes, of course you are! But you are a king, not because of some essence inside.
- K: That’s blasphemy. I’m a king by divine right, by birth right, and by merit.
- S: No doubt about it. But you are mainly a king because you have the material power to impose your will.
- K: Maybe so too, but I could not use my power without the personal qualities which allow me to do so, my spirit, my strong sense of self, my essence. Being a King is what I am, it’s my identity.
- S: Well, let’s see what they have to say about identity, because I am afraid they have problems with this concept too!!
- K: Maybe we should stop taking them seriously!
- S: But there is nothing serious in what they say!

REFERENCE

- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2014). *What is philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press.