

Self in Mind

Perspectives on Self and Self-Representation

University of Western Australia
Webb Lecture Theatre
November 25 & 26, 2019

Monday, November 25

- 09:00-09:25 Coffee
09:25-09:30 Welcome
09:30-10:45 Monima Chadha: *Self-reference and self-identification*
10:45-11:15 Morning tea
11:15-12:30 Clas Weber: *Material people in logical space – A 2D approach to the self*
12:30-13:45 Lunch (UWA Club)
13:45-15:00 Kelsey Perrykkad & Jakob Hohwy: *Self-evidencing and the action-perception loop*
15:10-16:25 Jeanette Kennett & Steve Matthews: *The last self standing: self-image and sense-making in dementia*

Tuesday, November 26

- 09:00-09:30 Coffee
09:30-10:45 Philip Gerrans: *Damasio's error*
10:45-11:15 Morning tea
11:15-12:30 Andrew Bailey: *Magical thinking*
12:30-14:15 Lunch (Bayside Kitchen)
14:15-15:30 Brentyn Ramm: *First-person experiments in self-awareness*
15:30-16:00 Afternoon tea
16:00-17:15 Chris Letheby: *Can there be totally selfless phenomenal states?*
17:15-17:20 Closing remarks

19:30-late After-party – Little Creatures (Fremantle). All welcome.

Abstracts

Monday, November 25

09.30-10:45

Self-reference and self-identification

Monima Chadha (Monash)

The debates surrounding the reference of "I" in the Indian and Western traditions are philosophically embroiled in metaphysical questions about the existence and the nature of the self. However, questions like what, if anything, does "I" refer to are not as intractable as metaphysical questions about the nature of the self. A good strategy to approach the self/no-self debate is to begin by answering the question about the referent of "I" and then use semantics as a guide for making progress on the metaphysics of the self. This strategy, I will argue, takes us quite a distance in the self/no-self debate for it clarifies what kind of object the self must be.

11:15-12:30

Material People in Logical Space: A Two-Dimensionalist Approach to the Self

Clas Weber (UWA)

In this talk I want to defend a certain combination of views concerning the self. I argue that it is possible to combine phenomenalism about the concept of the self with materialism about its nature. I consider two objections against this package deal: i.) the argument from disembodiment and ii.) Bayne's objection to substrate phenomenalism. I respond to these objections by using the two-dimensionalist analysis of necessary a posteriori and contingent a priori statements. Both responses appeal to different forms of modal illusions. I maintain that the objection from disembodiment relies on a modal illusion connected to the necessary a posteriori, and that Bayne's objection relies on a modal illusion connected to the contingent a priori.

13:45-15:00

Self-evidencing and the action-perception loop

Kelsey Perrykkad (Monash) and **Jakob Hohwy** (Monash)

We discuss the importance of closing the action-perception loop for understanding the self, and relate this to the notion of self-evidencing. We present data from an experiment on self-related processing that closes the loop and demonstrates the role of prediction-error minimization for inference and sense of agency.

15:10-16:25

The last self standing: self-image and sense-making in dementia

Jeanette Kennett (Macquarie) & **Steve Matthews** (ACU)

Loss of self is the most feared aspect of dementia however a recent review (Strikwerda-Brown et al 2019) has confirmed that the self-schema or self-image is relatively preserved, though out of date, in Alzheimers Dementia. Given this preservation, it provides some grounds for assuaging the fears about 'loss of self', but it raises questions about how to interact with persons whose self-image is out of date. We examine the organising role of self-image in agency and argue that considerations related to sense-making should take precedence over truth-telling in respecting the agency and dignity of persons living with dementia.

Tuesday, November 26

09.30-10:45

Damasio's error

Philip Gerrans (Adelaide)

In *Descartes' Error* Antonio Damasio claimed that our understanding of the mind is haunted by the ghost of Cartesian Metaphysics and provided a neuroscience-based exorcism based on treating self-awareness as a form of neural representation of bodily states. His work has immense influence among interdisciplinary theorists who aim to integrate scientific and philosophical understanding of emotions, self-awareness and consciousness. Interestingly however contemporary neuroscience suggests Descartes was right. The self is non-physical. Of course it depends what you mean by "physical" (normally having spatio-temporal coordinates) but the issue is not merely semantic. There are some lessons here for understanding the nature of bodily self awareness.

11:15-12:30

Magical thinking

Andrew Bailey (Yale-NUS)

According to theists, God is an immaterial thinking self. The main question of this paper is whether theism supports the view that we are immaterial thinking selves too. I shall argue in the negative. Along the way, I will also explore some implications in the metaphysics of mind and self following from the observation that, on theism, God's mentality is in a certain respect magical. One of my main goals here will be to introduce and defend a kind of magical materialism according to which, though we are wholly material selves, our thinking is magical and untethered to the material world. This hypothesis is brazen and even astonishing. But it might just be true.

14:15-15:30

First-Person Experiments in Self-Awareness

Brentyn Ramm (Independent)

From a third-person perspective I appear as a person in the world. What, however, is it like to be myself as the observing subject? Can the subject itself be experienced directly from the first-person perspective? Most philosophers since Hume have answered in the negative. Consistent with some meditative traditions, I will argue that the subject, if it exists, is a mode-neutral field of awareness (e.g., silent and colourless) and that a candidate for this awareness can be directly experienced. To show this, I will guide the audience through a series of first-person experiments. These experiments use apparatus such as viewing tubes and mirrors to investigate the gap or absence where one cannot see one's own head. One aim will be to show a phenomenal difference between oneself as an object (a person) and the observing subject. We will also investigate what it's like to be the subject using other sensory modalities. I will respond to the objections that the open space that one is looking from is just a sensory blind spot and that the first-person experience is inconsistent with the third-person perspective.

16:00-17:15

Can there be totally selfless phenomenal states?

Chris Letheby (UWA, Adelaide)

According to what Billon and Kriegel (2015) call the Subjectivity Principle (SP), a minimal form of self-awareness—known as “subjectivity” or “for-me-ness”—necessarily accompanies all phenomenally conscious mental states. Various putative counterexamples have been presented; notably, pathological states (thought insertion and depersonalization), drug-induced states (psychedelic ego dissolution), and meditative states (experiences of ‘selflessness’). In turn, various ingenious analyses have been offered that defend SP against the putative counterexamples. I will review this debate, with a focus on psychedelic ego dissolution: the most recent, and arguably the strongest, potential counterexample to SP. I will argue that (1) prominent defences of SP against empirical counterexamples are seriously flawed, but (2) the psychedelic evidence still falls short of definitively demonstrating the existence of totally selfless phenomenal states.