

In what sense are you the same person today that you were when you were ten?

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Abstract. This article is in favor of a non-romantic and non-essential exploration of the "true self". It is impossible to go back and gain direct insight into the "same person" (original self or original identity). The exploration of human nature can only be achieved through the exploration of all that is inherent in human nature. This paper will first analyze the philosophical basis of man's independence from the environment, point out its existing problems, and finally argue that man's subordination to the environment is our real experience, although not necessarily reflected in such a conscious way.

Keywords: the true self; independent; subordinate; human; environment.

1. Introduction

This question is equivalent to asking whether the environment will completely change human beings while growing up so that one becomes another. If people exist independently of the environment, they can not be completely changed by the environment. Otherwise, they will be changed by the environment.

There are two viewpoints on this argument:

(1) Person is independent of the environment. The most classic expression of this view is Descartes' "I am thinking therefore I exist (cogito, ergo sum)" that is, as this article will explain below, there is a prior self preexisting to the environment in this proposition. This means they do not become another person as they face the environment.

(2) Person is subordinate to the environment. The most classic expression of this issue is Marx's Theses on Feuerbach: human beings are "the ensemble of the social relations". This means that there is no authentic self at all; the person is always already another person;

This article will first analyze the philosophical basis of the first point of view, point out its problems, and finally demonstrate that the second point of view is our real-life experience, although not necessarily in such a reflection of a conscious way.

2. The Same Person: The Effect of the Subject

2.1 The Philosophical Foundation of the Continuity of the Self

In the history of philosophy, it is that Descartes is broadly regarded as the philosopher who initially affirmed the priority position of human beings as subjects. Next, this article will further illustrate the relationship between personal identity and the priority status of the subject by analyzing Descartes' theory of subjectivity. The development of a person from ten years old to high school also makes us quickly think of Jean Piaget's developmental psychology theory. According to the theory, humans have several different stages of psychological development. As human develops, their knowledge accumulation increase, their views of the world are created, and even their cognitive ability will experience a considerable change. However, only one factor remains constant, and this is the one who owns the ability. In fact, the knowledge formation for Piaget is not the subject's cognition of the object, but the subject's original cognitive structure and ability, which is constructed through inter-subject communication. "I" never changes. This is because the development process is built upon a constant foundation known as the subject and a person's identity; otherwise, the concept of "developing" will become meaningless. Therefore, personal identity is the premise of changes and developments in

Piaget's theory. In other words, no matter how a person changes during a developing process, he or she is always the same person.

When discussing philosophy and the self, one cannot fail to examine the theories proposed by Descartes. The 'Cartesian Self' stems from Descartes' theory of mind-body dualism, which essentially states that a human being is made up of an object (the human body) and the subject (the mind). According to Descartes, the self is the precondition by which we can view something as human. Before this, many believed the self was just an extension of God and his ideas, but with Descartes' theory, philosophy expanded, and the area of subjectivity opened up. Descartes' famous "cogito, ergo sum" (Latin for "I think, therefore I am"), set the stage for future philosophers to build their own ideas of the self. For example, when considering the question, "are we still the same person we were ten years ago", we are in the moment doubting, and by doubting, we exist in that moment, proving the constant self. According to Descartes, this constancy is the basis of all cognition. There is always a person prior to the action of doubting this question, and this subject is always the constant "I", the "I" that will never change. As a result, "The same person" means establishing that "subject" is the basis of all cognition. The absolute and abstract subjectivity is prior to empirical cognition, which means that before there is knowledge, one already has one's existence. One's existence does not depend on one's acquired learning. Eventually, one's subjectivity can help one become the owner of oneself instead of being the lamb of God and authority of church. Being the same as oneself means one can be the master of oneself and maintain independence and freedom from outside influences. This idea is the basis of liberalism.

2.2 The Philosophical Defense of the Continuity of the Self: A Problem

Despite all of the above, Descartes' idea is highly controversial. The Cartesian subject can be read as something impenetrable, unchanging, solid: since the 'I', the subject, is unaffected by external influences, then one is one's own master. Although the idea that "man can be his own master" provided the foundation for modern liberalism theory, Western Marxism severely criticized it. Moreover, this critique can be traced back to Rousseau. While affirming the natural state of man, Rousseau also put forward the concept of alienation, despite there is still a problem of whether Rousseau thinks that man can return to the state of nature or not. From the perspective of etymology, the original meaning of subject is not the master, but subjection: the subject is always subordinate to something.

3. Alienation

Everyone has a social identity that is provided by society, meaning the roles given to one by that society. Some people consider subjectivity to include the fact that even though one might wear masks in their day-to-day life, they always retain their original role which acts as a core to who they are – all other things around that core are known as alienation.

This is similar to Descartes' line of thought, because admitting an original or natural existence of oneself is a human instinct. However, we have to consider the question: Can we be ourselves? Imagine all the roles we're given in our lives: parents, children, students, workers, and so on – if one were to lose all of these, would we be anyone? From this perspective, we can conclude that who we are and the constant self is not abstract but a variety of concrete roles society gives us. Without these socialization, one would become a nobody (a person without conceptualization by any regime), just like the state of nature in Rousseau's discourse. Therefore, from this perspective, we can conclude that "Who am I" in reality and "the same me" in society are not abstract subjects but a variety of concrete subject technology (it refers to various norms for the subject). They come from various disciplines and the shaping of people by state institutions. Thus, if Rousseau's state of nature is not the reality of our life, alienation is not a superficial phenomenon; it is instead the essence, and there is no possibility of being a noble savage in our life, alienation is the very nature of us. This means

that we can only exist in different societal roles but do not have an original identity. However, this article will argue that we may not have such freedom or liberty.

4. The Impact of “Not the Same Person”

This section will introduce the two meanings of “not the same person”, which are also based on two modes of thinking about alienation. The first meaning refers to the idea that people originally had an original self, but were later alienated from that self by various social factors. The second refers to the idea that the original self doesn't exist at all, and alienation itself is the essence of being human. These two ways of thinking show us different ways to reflect on who we are and how we live.

According to the first meaning, we must return to the original self, which is a near-Utopian way of thinking, also essentialist and romanticist in nature. Simply put, it refers to bringing people back to their original selves and to embrace that original self fully. Within this realm of thinking though, there are two distinct possibilities.

The first of these is to assume that one has a certain essence (such as the natural state mentioned by Rousseau in *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* or the nature of a kind child mentioned in *Emile*) and to believe that this essence can be intuitively understood and also can be returned. In other words, if I were to think about whether my current self is the same as my ten-year-old self, if I believe I've deviated from that ten-year-old self then I need to overcome alienation and reconnect with who I used to be, which is who I really am.

Another approach is one of nihilism, which is the existentialist thinking of the 20th century (seemingly returning to Descartes' definition of a subject). Nihilism itself is also an essence, in which by doubting all values those values lose their constraints. To sum up, no matter what scheme, it is an essentialism scheme, even though this essence appears nihilistic.

To this point, this essentialist thinking can still be traced back to the Cartesianism mentioned above[Michael Allen Gillespie(1995), *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, University of Chicago Press. Its variant to Cartesianism includes only two points: (1) As far as the former romantic view is concerned, it believes that alienation is external to the subject, and the subject is prior to the alienation brought about by society so that it can return to the transcendental Cartesian subject; (2) as far as the latter existentialist nihilism is concerned, it merely defends the nothingness character of the Cartesian subject again against any alienation (existentialists call this alienation "essence" and put forward the slogan "existence precedes essence"). For example, the proposition that girls should wear skirts is the alienation the existentialists criticize as the essence of women. So far, we have discovered a paradox, that is, according to this line of thinking, people either fall into essentialism or nihilism (or nihilism is also a kind of essentialism with nothingness as its essence).

In other words, as long as we admit that we are always the same person, this person's definition is either a stereotype(that is, in a stereotyped way, "I should be a certain person"); or a complete emptiness("I don't know what to do to my life").

The inherent contradiction of the above line of thinking can only lead us to another. According to the second meaning, it requires one to cease all illusions about one's original state (in this sense, it requires me to reject all forms of romanticism). In this way of thinking, one only exists in alienation. One cannot directly recognize the original self, and the formation of this 'self' concept can only be achieved through the presence of others. For example, I need the recognition of my parents and society to feel myself. Althusser also gave a very classic example of this issue. A person is walking on the street, and a policeman shouts, "Hey! You!" to him. The subject is formed when the person turns his head[L Althusser(2014), *On the reproduction of capitalism: Ideology and ideological state apparatuses*, Verso. In other words, the subject is formed only after being interpellated by ideology, and the subject (that I) itself is the result of ideological domestication rather than the cause; the primordial ego itself is a function of ideology. This kind of thinking does not assume all the natural states; therefore, pursuing the truth about the 'self' can only be achieved through critical reflection on social ideology (the various people, things, and spiritual phenomena around me). In other words, the

search for the original truth of 'I' can only be achieved by analyzing the other or the big other in Lacan's words

In this kind of thinking, returning to the original self is impossible. In other words, according to this line of thinking, alienation cannot be wholly overcome. Alienation is the natural state, the essence. Overcoming alienation means the eternal criticism of alienation.

In reality, our personalities are not empty. We will have identities (like Chinese, Japanese, men, women, LGBTQs, etc.), but these identities are not born with but given. Being the same person as oneself means that one's identity is a priori, and we may think that our identities are a priori post factum; furthermore, the experience of alienation tells us that this "a priori" itself is an ideological effect.

5. Conclusion

The assumption about the original self is that it's always been related to romanticism and essentialism, but romanticism and essentialism are themselves ideologies. This article is in favor of the non-romantic and non-essential exploration of the "true self". Returning and direct insight into the "same person"(the original self or original identity) is impossible. The exploration of human nature can only be achieved by exploring all that lies within it. Like Lacan's assertion: the subject is a function of the "Other".

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- [19] Daniel C. Knudsen, Jillian M. Rickly, Elizabeth S. Vidon(2016), The fantasy of authenticity: Touring with Lacan, Annals of Tourism Research, Volume 58, pp.33-45. *ibid.* The big other in Lacan's term is the synonym of ideology.