
Personhood and the “multiple self” view¹

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Abstract

This paper critically assesses the supposition that the best way to capture the intuition that the concept of personhood has practical importance is to analyse personhood in terms of multiple selves. It explores the works of David Velleman and, more recently, Stanley Klein in illuminating the multiple self model. The paper argues that the reasons driving belief in multiple selves, and the subsequent conceptual distinctions between selves that David Velleman encourages, has not been sufficiently motivated. Among other things, it makes the point that Velleman’s theory of self is plagued with the problem of ambiguity and arbitrariness. It also argues that Stanley Klein’s recent attempt to ground the belief in multiple selves in empirical analysis is fraught with difficulties.

Introduction

My intention is to engage with the idea that the most attractive way to make sense of the inherent link between personhood and practical concerns is to appeal to “multiple selves”, each self required to capture a distinct person-specific phenomena, or the context that occasions the relevant practical concern. Two philosophers, for differing but not necessarily conflicting reasons, do just that. I shall argue that David Velleman’s (2006a) conceptual argument for distinguishing them sharply and Stanley Klein’s (2014) more recent attempt to ground belief in multiple selves in empirical analysis is fraught with difficulties.² Ultimately, the goal is to shift attention to an alternative way of thinking about personhood that is firmly entrenched in African philosophy—one that defines a person not in terms of proper parts, but rather in terms of the typical developmental trajectory of an enculturated human being. I suggest the basic contours of this approach.

Velleman and the disguises of self

Velleman’s analysis of person develops in two stages. We first identify the appropriate contexts in which certain activities or practical concerns implicate the subject of personhood. And then we identify the aspect of a person that is presented to the person’s consciousness as the subject of that activity or context. The two stages are linked through the notion of reflexivity, “a way of thinking that directs an activity or mental state at its own

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² It is worth noting that although the selves distinguished by these philosophers do not coincide, these philosophers offer two distinct kinds of defence of the multiple self view and focusing on them allows me to examine these conceptual and empirical arguments in turn.

subject conceived as such” (Velleman 2006a, 2). Self is the word used to convey the idea that some aspect of a person stands in for the person as the subject of some activity or context.

With that in mind, consider what might stand in for self in what Velleman calls the context of moral assessment. When a person is asked by an interview panel to describe herself; when she feels self-pity; when he is said to act out of character; when persons criticise, love and hate each other; it is typically the self-image, or aspects of it, that is the target of these practices. “When he feels self-esteem”, Velleman writes, “he feels it about the sort of person he is, and hence toward himself as characterized by his self-image” (Velleman 2006a, 4). It is the repository of all of a person’s essential and inessential characteristics. It is the criterion of a person’s integrity, “because it represents how his various characteristics cohere into a unified personality, with which he must be consistent in order to be self-consistent, or true to himself” (Velleman 2006a, 4).

A different entity, or part of a person, however, is presented to one’s mind as self, according to Velleman, in the context of identity over time.³ When I anticipate the future, wonder whether or not I might survive some episode, when we ask whether or not some person now is responsible for some heinous crime done in the past, or that the beneficiary of a pension fund will be the dutiful civil servant now working for it, we are interested in what Velleman calls “notional” subjects. These are subjects of first-personal thought from whose perspectives past or future experiences are framed, are imagined by the *actual* remembering or intending subject. “Past and future selves”, he writes, “are simply the past and future persons whom the subject can represent as the ‘I’ of a memory or the ‘I’ of a plan—persons of whom he can think reflexively, as ‘me’” (Velleman 2006a, 5).⁴

One might doubt that notional thoughts are given reflexively in first-personal thought in the way Velleman envisages. When one recalls the past or anticipates the future, what is typically presented reflexively to one’s mind, it seems, are the anticipated or remembered events, and not necessarily the *subject* of these experiences. If this is the case, Velleman may have simply superimposed notional subjects on past and future experiences.⁵ Notwithstanding, Velleman holds that the word “self” does not denote any one thing; specifically, it refers, in this context, to the notional subject of first-personal thought.

Finally, Velleman maintains that there is a distinct self lurking behind our experience of ourselves as self-governing agents. And after noting that some of our behaviours are neither authored by us nor under our control, and thus the distinction between actions that are self-governed and those that are not, Velleman claims that when one acts autonomously, one is being guided by a higher-order aim—the aim of knowing or making sense of what one is

³ For more on identity, and specifically how questions of numerical identity and psychological connectedness may come apart, see Derek Parfit (1984).

⁴ In order to rule out cases in which an actual subject *stipulates* that a notional past subject who, for instance, witnessed the walls of Jericho falling down is self-same, Velleman adds that genuine “self to self” relations over time are ones that are “unselfconscious”, involving no prior psychological act of stipulation (2006a, 198).

⁵ The suspicion is John Perry’s (2010).

doing.⁶ It is this aim that tips the balance in favour of some of the motives that move a person to act, thereby putting the subsequent behaviour under the agent's control. More clearly, to be under this aim is for a person to act for reasons that provide a rationale for some course of action, by reference to the motives, desires, values and emotions in light of which the relevant action is intelligible. Here is Velleman, When one's behaviour is guided by such considerations, it is guided by one's capacity for making sense of behaviour, which is one's causal understanding and is therefore presented in reflexive guise to that very understanding, as the self that causes one's behaviour (2006a, 8). The self of self-governance, then, is the faculty of causal understanding.⁷

Even if Frankfurt is wrong

Velleman's attempt to neatly distinguish the three selves is not unintentional. He reckons that "... expecting a single entity to play the role of self in all of these [i.e. above] contexts can only lead to confusion" (2006a, 2).

The confusion Velleman cautions against is due to Harry Frankfurt (1999), who held that the boundary of personhood is delimited by those motives with which the agent reflectively and wholeheartedly identifies, namely a proper part of the agent's psychology. And because the agent wholeheartedly identifies, namely a proper part of the agent's psychology. And because the agent wholeheartedly identifies with these motives, namely in such a way that that agent is not internally determining what is volitionally possible for the agent. "What a person cares about", says Frankfurt, "constrains the person himself, by limiting the choices he can make" (1999, 113). Frankfurt adds that it would be unthinkable for the agent to form an effective intention with regard to motives that are outside the core of endorsed motives—not while remaining the same person. His example is instructive:

Agamemnon at Aulis is destroyed by an inescapable conflict between two equally defining elements in his own nature: his love for his daughter and his love for the army he commands. His ideals for himself include both being a devoted father and being devoted to the welfare of his men. When he is forced to sacrifice one of these, he is thereby forced to betray himself. Rarely, if ever, do tragedies of this sort have sequels. Since the volitional unity of the tragic hero has been irreparably ruptured, there is a sense in which the person he had been no longer exists. Hence, there can be no continuation of *his* story (1999, 139, emphasis in the original).

When Agamemnon sacrifices one of his cares, which in Frankfurt's view constitute his personal essence, not only does he betray himself or suffers a crisis of identity, his volitional unity is also compromised and, ultimately, he ceases to be the same person: "rarely, if ever, do tragedies of this sort have sequels".

⁶ See Velleman (2004) for a more detailed discussion of his account of autonomy.

⁷ Catriona Mackenzie (2007) has observed that the faculty of causal understanding, believed to be the self of self-governance, does in fact play a more decisive role in Velleman's theory of selfhood than he acknowledges. (See Velleman's 2007 reply to Mackenzie for his discussion of the problem.) I shall press Mackenzie's observation further, indicating why it presents a unique challenge to the "multiple self" view.

Velleman describes the self so conceived variously as the “True Self”, “essential self” and “inner core or kernel” (2006a, 339, 359). His major criticism of it is that it takes a *single* entity, namely a proper part of person’s psychology with which he wholeheartedly identifies, to be the target for self-regarding emotions, or moral assessment, the locus of agential control and the basis of sameness over time. This is why, when Agamemnon fails to be true to his “essential self”, he is also judged to have ceased to exist as the same person; and when his volitional unity is “irreparably ruptured”, this is read as a failure to continue to exist. But in reality, insists Velleman, this is not so; the failure to self-govern does not typically amount to the failure of survival and ordinary cases of inauthenticity, namely acting out of line with one’s conception of oneself need not be read as the inability to self-govern. Insisting otherwise leads to confusion and is the result of the belief that a single entity can play the role of self in the contexts of personal identity over time, moral assessment and autonomy. And so, Velleman blames the single-self model.

Yet, even if Frankfurt’s account is confused, we still have no reason to reject belief in a single self. First, it is not clear that what leads to the confusion is that belief rather than belief in motivational constancy—the belief that remaining one and the same person involves the retention of certain core motives and character traits, in this case ones with which the agent wholeheartedly identifies. A closer analysis reveals that it is the presence of belief in motivational constancy that drives the ridiculous conclusion that breakdown in one’s ability to properly self-govern amounts to the end of one’s story. But one might reject belief in motivational constancy while holding on to belief in a single self. In this case, where one is inauthentic in one’s behaviour or not properly self-governed, one’s identity over time is not compromised since one’s continued existence would not require the retention of particular motives, beliefs and character traits. On the alternative view, we can track the continuity of a self over time by tracking the complex causal connections of one’s psychological life—particular motivational states need not be retained over time.

Velleman is unable to anticipate this possibility, however. This is because he holds a perdurance view of persistence, according to which for one to persist over time one must exist as distinct, non-identical parts of a person, or person-slices at various points in time.⁸ That is, the only way for a *single* self to persist over time is for it to be motivationally constant. But this need not be so, unless one is already predisposed to believe a perdurance theory of persistence. The point—and this is the second difficulty with Velleman’s analysis and subsequent rejection of Frankfurt’s belief in a single self—is that in order to establish that belief in a single self leads to the kind of confusion against which he rails, Velleman, like Frankfurt, must wrongly assume that persistence over time requires motivational constancy. To avoid the confusion, one must reject this mistaken assumption, but this does not entail rejecting belief in a single self.

⁸ Neil McKinnon (2002) has an interesting piece in which he outlines the differences between endurance and perdurance theories of persistence; Sally Haslanger (1989) has an interesting argument against perdurance. See Katherine Hawley (2001) for arguments against perdurance and her defense of a related view, stage theory, according to which each time-slice (self) is a wholly present person at a time but not identical to suitably related time-slices at other times.

No help from Mr Locke

Moreover, Velleman thinks that the belief that there are multiple selves is rooted in Locke's notion of personhood. John Locke had made the point that a person is a "thinking" thing that "can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places" ([1690] 1975, 335). This is what Velleman makes of it:

[Self to Self] comes from John Locke, who described a person's consciousness of his past as making him "self to himself" across spans of time. Implicit in this phrase is the view that the word "self" does not denote any one entity but expresses a reflexive guise under which parts or aspects of a person are presented to his own mind (2006a, 1).

But Velleman cannot get the help he seeks from Locke.⁹ First, it is worth noting that Locke's claim is clearly neutral between two competing theories of persistence—endurance and perdurance— whereas Velleman's must read it through the lens of perdurantism in order to force the idea that "the word 'self' does not denote any one entity".¹⁰ This, of course, is not a knockdown argument against Velleman's reading of Locke; it is, however, the beginning of the point that this discovery about personhood is Velleman's and not Locke's.

Consider that Velleman's way of characterising what Locke means by "self to self", namely as picking out more than one entity as self, can only be successfully made on the pain of admitting that Locke was not offering an account of personal identity at all, but only of similarity between person-stages. This is especially true because on Velleman's representation of Locke, distinctive, causally linked features of psychology are not required to ground the relations between distinct person-parts. All that is required is that one regards the subject of recollection or anticipation as oneself in first-personal thought. If this is the case, however, we have no way of ruling out cases in which one regards someone else's future or past person-stage as oneself. This seems to me a huge cost of reading Locke in the way Velleman does, and one that significantly outweighs the benefit of gleaning from Locke's account the idea that the word "self" picks out more than one entity. Moreover, we need not accept this cost in light of more formidable characterisations of Locke that avoid it and do not resort to the language of multiple selves.¹¹

But even if Velleman's reading of Locke is correct, this does not support Velleman's general thesis: that the word "self" denotes distinct entities across contexts. One might concede that distinct, non-identical person times-slices are selves in their own right, but

⁹ I do not think Velleman refers to Locke here simply to clinch the case for belief in multiple self; yet by rooting that belief in Locke's account of personal identity, he seeks to give it leverage. It is not uncommon to find in mainstream discourse on personal identity references to a Lockean heritage as a source of pedigree. Many neo-Lockean conceptions of personal identity, including Parfit's Psychological Continuity view (1984), may be read that way. Schechtman (1996) also presents her self-constitution view that way. But unlike Velleman, she does not take the stretching backwards of consciousness as described by Locke to indicate two distinct selves standing in some relation. Instead, she argues that, by extending consciousness backwards, Locke is concerned with the appropriation of past experiences by some present consciousness. For our present purposes, it is important to note that nothing in what Locke says *necessarily* supports the idea that the word "self" denotes distinct entities, or parts of a person, at various points in times.

¹⁰ For a discussion of Velleman's explicit commitment to a perdurance theory of persistence, see his "So it goes" (2006b)

¹¹ Again, see Marya Schechtman (1996).

deny that at any one time there are three distinct selves corresponding to three contexts—which is the core of Velleman’s theory of self.

And the reason why the transition, namely from self as denoting more than one entity over time to self as denoting more than one entity across contexts, cannot be made unproblematically is that the term “self” would become too loose, referring at once to a full subject of first-personal thought and to proper parts of that subject. That is, sliding from a notional subject of anticipatory thought or autobiographical recollection to a self-image or faculty of causal understanding, which are proper autobiographical recollection to a self-image or faculty of causal understanding, which are proper parts of notional subjects of thought. The notional subject is equipped with enough of personhood and so can easily pass as self. Self-image and the faculty of causal understanding, however, being parts of a full-blown subject of first-personal thought, are not and it is unclear why we should regard these as self even if we grant that notional subjects are.

So, the word “self” in Velleman’s theory refers rather loosely and as a result lacks traction. And this is because his attempt to bolster his “multiple self” view by aligning it with Locke’s does not quite succeed, as it illegitimately slides between two meanings of the term “self” in Locke’s phrase “self to self”: as distinct *independent* entities of the same kind at different points in time, and as distinct dependent entities of different kinds across contexts, with theoretical expediency the only way of deciding when and which is most appropriate.

Arbitrariness and ambiguity

But there is more to oppose in Velleman’s theory of self. First, the analysis of self offers no reliable way of deciding why and which part of a person is the legitimate self of a designated context. Take the faculty of causal understanding, for instance. A close analysis reveals that it is no more the self of self-governance than it is, say, the self of self-sameness or moral assessment. If Velleman is right about the role of this faculty in distinguishing autonomous actions from non-autonomous ones, and since ordinary cases of recollection of the past or anticipation of the future count as autonomous, this faculty appears to be decisive in each and all three contexts.¹² But it is identified as self in one, and not the others. And we have no way of knowing why this is so besides the fact that the theory stipulates this.

Notice that there is a potential basis for a more unified theory of self. If the self of autonomy is so decisive, it provides a potential for uniting the otherwise disunited selves. But Velleman skirts this option, presumably because defining self in terms of what constitutes the basis for self-governed behaviour is likely to yield similar difficulties to the one encountered by Frankfurt’s conception. So, Velleman must insist that the faculty of causal understanding, although the most decisive of all three, in each and all the contexts, must be restricted only to the context of self-governance.

¹² I have already noted Mackenzie’s important observation that one of Velleman’s three selves, the self of autonomy or the faculty of causal understanding, is decisive in all three contexts he identifies.

Yet, it is not hard to see that despite restricting the self of autonomy to a specific context, the recognition of its inevitably decisive role in all three contexts exposes the theory to the very same problems that plagued Frankfurt's account. For it appears that a severe breakdown in the self of self-governance will significantly compromise Velleman's other selves—of self-sameness and moral assessment. That is, even on Velleman's account of multiple selves, in which one of the supposedly distinct selves is so decisive, it is unlikely that the confusion Velleman cautions against has been avoided. This result reinforces the earlier point that the reason for that confusion was not belief in a single self. Clearly, belief in more than one self, like Velleman's, is not completely immune from the charge that failure of autonomy can compromise identity over time.

Not only has Velleman not moved significantly away from the difficulties that plagued Frankfurt, there is a deeper problem with regard to the ways in which the three selves interact. Bear in mind that ordinary cases of self-governed behaviour cannot be made sense of without the mediating influence of what Velleman characterises as a self-image (e.g. a presidential aspirant chooses to act in ways that are consistent with his conception of himself as a socialist); as well, situations where the self-image is thought to be object of concern (e.g. self-criticism) do not exclude autonomy, thus implicating the faculty of causal understanding. The entire account seems to arbitrarily regard one part of a person as the self of some context even though it is patently clear that all the parts identified by Velleman are almost always present in any one context. Here, I have focused on how the part of a person responsible for his autonomous action, namely the faculty of causal understanding, on Velleman's account is present and active in the context Velleman identifies as self-assessment and yet that faculty is not the self in this context. It is a self in the context of autonomy, in which a self-image is almost always involved, and yet the latter is not the self of this context. Throughout, it is unclear what principle is being applied in deciding which part of a person qualifies as self in a it is unclear what principle is being applied in deciding which part given context when they are all present and active in that context.

The same difficulty applies when we consider the context of self-sameness. Here, Velleman says notional subjects in the past and in the envisaged future are selves. But, once we grant the intelligibility of notional subjects, we can superimpose them in the other contexts too. When I indulge in self-pity, for example, in the context of moral assessment, we can imagine a notional subject doing the pitying and a notional subject pitied, just as Velleman asks us to imagine a notional subject of past experience and a notional subject of future experience. If this is so, it is unclear why a self-image, and notional subjects, is the self in the context of moral assessment. Similar questions can be raised in the context of autonomy. When one is self-governed, we can superimpose on this experience a self that governs and a self that is governed, once again following the reasoning Velleman employs in deciding what is self in the context of self-sameness. In the context of autonomy, however, Velleman has no place for notional subjects but only some capacity in a person. And there is no explanation or justification whatsoever.

It is important to return again to the insight that there are complex layers of interaction between and among the various selves and this, it would seem, should compel a more unified picture of self than Velleman is inclined to defend. Yet, he prefers to skim over these interactions. This is not a damaging point, however, since one might still maintain that although the selves interact in the ways I have suggested, they are nevertheless distinct, and so Velleman's general thesis is unaffected. This counter is hasty, however. First, the observation that the selves interact in complex ways does not directly support the view that there are more than one self, instead it is neutral between that and the view that the so-called distinct selves are merely sub-systems in a single-self model. Second, the complex interactions also suggest that in any one context no one self recognised by Velleman functions independently of the others, and without functional independence the decision easily swings in favour of a single-self model with functionally dependent sub-systems.¹³ It is unclear then why Velleman opts to distinguish sharply between selves rather than offer a theory accounting for how the various parts of a person interact, even if complexly.

Klein's empirical support

Even if my complaints against Velleman's theory of selfhood are justified, it might still be the case that the general idea of multiple selves is justified especially if that idea can be grounded in empirical analysis. Stanley Klein has noted that "ultimately, we will not make progress coming to terms with our object of inquiry—the self—until we acknowledge that the self is a *multiplicity*, consisting of (at least) two intimately related, yet metaphysically separable aspects..." (2014, 113, emphasis in the original). He goes on to characterise these selves and to demonstrate how the distinction between them can be grounded in empirical analysis.

The two selves Klein has in mind are the ontological and epistemological selves. The latter is the conscious, first-person subjectivity; the *subject* as opposed to the object of analysis. Klein grants that this self is potentially immaterial, and definitely not reducible to the neuro-physical basis of experience. This characteristic is assigned to the epistemological self. It is the raw data of self-experience and provides the content experienced by the ontological self. None of the preceding is controversial; the claims do not require us to non-trivially regard these aspects of a person as distinct selves.

Klein, however, considers several clinical cases that ostensibly grounds the functional independence of these aspects and, on this basis, he regards them as independent selves.¹⁴ (Although the selves he identifies do not coincide with Velleman's, they both seem to agree on the general idea that there are more than one self.) The first case is *Loss of perceptual ownership*, the case of D.P., who complained that he experienced "double vision".

After examination it was established that D.P. did not actively experience double vision; rather he was able to see everything normally, but "he did not immediately recognize that he

¹³ Below I examine whether Stanley Klein's empirical grounding of belief in more than one self succeeds in establishing the required functional independence of distinct self systems.

¹⁴ The first series of cases Klein samples are plagued with a number of difficulties, including interpretive and methodological ones. Specifically, some cases are highly suggestive, highly controversial or characterised by co-morbidity. Below, I focus on two "pure" cases—i.e. free of these challenges—and upon which Klein's empirical justification hinges.

was the one who perceives and that he needed a second step to become aware that he himself was the one who perceives the object” (Zahn et al. 2008, 398, in Klein 2014, 102). Klein goes on to explain that This “second step” entailed the use of inference—to circumvent the absence of experientially given personal ownership of the content of awareness—to establish, by virtue of its location (i.e. in his head), that a perceptual experience was his own (102).

The case supposedly shows both that first-person subjectivity and the content of first-person awareness can come apart and that in coming apart these two aspects remained functional. D.P.’s temporary loss of ownership of perceptual experience thus points to separation of the two selves, and further to the functional independence of each, on which their title to self is ostensibly based.

The second case is *Loss of memory ownership*.

As a result of a (sic) being hit by a car while riding his bicycle, R.B. suffered severe physical injuries, including a crushed pelvis and the fracturing of almost all of the ribs on the left side of his torso...To alleviate the pain he endured, R.B. initially was placed on a morphine drip, followed by pain medication administered orally. As the intensity of his pain subsided, he weaned himself off medication. Importantly, at the time of being tested for experienced personal ownership, R.B. was not on any pain medication. In addition, his memory impairments, aphasia, and verbal fluency deficits had resolved. However, not all cognitive function returned to normal. Specifically, R.B. could intentionally recall specific events temporarily and spatially situated in his personal past...but those memories were compromised in an unusual manner: The retrieved events were unaccompanied by a sense of personal ownership (Klein 2014, 103–104).

As with the previous case, the key point is that loss of personal ownership suggests temporary separation of and functional independence of Klein’s selves.

If Klein is right, we have a different reason to think that ordinary persons comprise more than one self. However, an obvious worry, and one that Klein himself seems to recognise, but brushes off rather quickly, is that conceding that the two aspects are separable does not compel a two-self model. These experimental results are consistent with a single-self model with complexly interlaced sub-systems. Under abnormal conditions, these parts do not quite coordinate properly, but this does not yet warrant the claim that there are functionally independent self-systems. Moreover, it is unclear in what sense the content of one’s experience is functionally independent given its very passive character in Klein’s overall picture: it is merely the raw data for the ontological self!

There is another worry. Although D.P. experiences temporary loss of perceptual ownership, which leads Klein to insist that the epistemological and ontological selves come apart, it is nevertheless the case that D.P. *does experience* not just the temporary loss of perceptual

ownership, but also the temporary separation of the selves. D.P. seems to be first-personally aware that aspects of himself are not well-coordinated.

Klein is silent on this point, but it presents two options to him. He could maintain that it is the ontological self that experiences the temporary separation. But it is hard to see how this is possible while insisting that there is a separation between the two selves. It is one thing for the ontological self to experience a loss of perceptual ownership of the content of experience, but quite another for D.P. to experience that the aspect of him Klein describes as the ontological self is indeed temporarily separated from the aspect of him Klein calls the epistemological self. More realistically, Klein should say that there is a further self, a third self, in virtue of which D.P. experiences the separation of the relevant aspects, or selves as Klein would call it. Similar remarks apply to R.B. as well. The regress should be obvious. Klein can only deny that there is a further self if he says that D.P. and R.B. are not first-personally aware that there is a separation of, or a lack of coordination between, these aspects of themselves. D.P. knows that the content of experience (epistemological self) and his sense of ownership of them (ontological self) are detached, but he can only possess this awareness in terms of something else, a further self perhaps, that recognises these features as aspects of himself indeed. The problem is not that we postulate a third self; instead it seems that we can postulate further selves infinitely.

But there is another side to this problem. If I am right that there is a further self from the perspective of which the supposed separation of, or lack of coordination between, Klein's two selves is experienced, then it is unclear why we should employ a two-self model built around the temporary separation of the two rather than a single-self model built around the idea that a *unified* subject of awareness seems to be present even when these two aspects of a person do not properly align, or are temporarily separated.

There are other empirical cases (e.g. split-brain syndrome) that seem to show that there is no subject of awareness over and above the disruption in conscious experience.¹⁵ A split-brain patient who, under experimental conditions, exhibits behavioural incongruence does not seem to be directly aware of the syndrome in the way that D.P. and R.P. are aware of the fact that they lack ownership of the content of experience (through verbal reports). Nevertheless, that case provides damaging results to Klein's aims. It clearly suggests that there is no simple, unified ontological self independent of the epistemological self since the surgical operation involving severing the hemispheres of the split-brain patients (i.e. the epistemological self, which Klein identifies as the neuro-physical aspect of a person) brings about two streams of consciousness (i.e. two ontological selves).¹⁶ This is not to negate the idea of a unified subject, but simply to indicate that that unity is not something over and above what Klein calls the neurological self.

In the end, not only do the conceptual arguments offered by Velleman in support of the multiple-self thesis fail to convince, the attempt by Klein to ground the conceptual

¹⁵ See Marks (1981) for a discussion of split-brain syndrome.

¹⁶ On which, see John Barresi's review (2014) of Klein's *Two Selves*

distinction in empirical analysis falls short as well. We need not shift attention away from multiple-self models to understand personhood and its relation to practical issues.

An alternative

Along the way, I have suggested that thinking in terms of the complex ways in which these multiple selves of Velleman and Klein interact can provide a starting point for a more unified conception. This intuition is deeply entrenched among African philosophers, including especially Ifeanyi Menkiti and Kwasi Wiredu, and has recently received substantial treatment in work by Marya Schechtman.¹⁷

In general, they are agreed that the various practical concerns and person-specific phenomena that our concept of person seeks to capture cannot be thought of as discrete occurrences. So, we are not autonomous in certain contexts and persisting over time in others; both are deeply integrated in the normal experiences of persons, and in particular their experience as selves in the world. As a result, we do not make progress in understanding personhood if we sharply distinguish these person-specific phenomena. Moreover, persons typically experience themselves as unified subjects and it is only as such that person-specific phenomena like persisting over time, autonomous behaviour and first-personal experience of self are possible. Contrary to Klein, self-understanding is not aided by prising apart the knowing and known self. Instead, our understanding of self must be rooted in the interaction of these different parts.

But there is more. Menkiti, Wiredu and the later Schechtman agree that in order to fully account for personhood we must keep in mind the ways in which biological, psychological, as well as cultural and/or social features interrelate in ordinary persons' understanding of themselves as selves in a world with others.

All these lead them to hold that persons are enculturated human beings (*à la* Menkiti and Wiredu) or enculturated agents (*à la* Schechtman).¹⁸ Two developments, marking the shift from Velleman's and Klein's approach, are worth noting. First, attention is turned away from considerations of *parts* (physical and psychological) internal to a person. The implication is that we need not talk in terms of selves as person parts or aspects, but as a unified subject of experience. This is in line with my earlier contention, when analysing Velleman and Klein, that the seeds for a more unified picture of self are already present in their respective accounts. Second, this approach locates the unified subject of experience in a sociocultural context. This is significant because it precludes the temptation to think of person-specific phenomena as discrete occurrences. Autonomous behaviour, persistence over time, and the questions of moral assessment that Velleman sharply distinguishes are all occurrences in the sociocultural world of persons. This removes the corresponding need to identify multiple selves corresponding to the different contexts.

¹⁷ Although these philosophers work in different philosophical traditions, there are important intersections in their thinking on personhood that allow us to begin to make sense of the shift away from multiple self views. See Menkiti (1984), Wiredu (2009) and Schechtman (2014).

¹⁸ Elaborating on the differences between these positions is beyond the immediate scope of this paper. The present aim is to indicate the broad outlines of the more unified approach to personhood.

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