ORIGIN AND NATURE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELF:

A Neurophilosophical Enquiry

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By

BINS SEBASTIAN

Under the Supervision of

DR. MANIDIPA SEN

CENTRE FOR PHILOSOPHY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI, 110067

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DECLARATION

I, Bins Sebastian, do hereby declare that the thesis titled "ORIGIN AND NATURE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELF: A Neurophilosophical Enquiry" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is an authentic work and has not been submitted for any other degree or diploma of this or any other institution or University to the best of my knowledge.

Bins Sebastian

Centre for Philosophy
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067
July 2016

Centre for Philosophy
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 10067

July 21, 2016

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This is to certify that the thesis titled "ORIGIN AND NATURE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELF: A Neurophilosophical Enquiry", submitted by Bins Sebastian, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is his original work. It has not been submitted, in part or full, for any degree or diploma of this or any other university, to the best of my knowledge.

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Dr. Manidipa Sen
CHAIRPERSON

Dr. Manidipa Sen
SUPERVISOR

Acknowledgement…

Thanks… To those

Who set stage for the play of my existence,
Who got ready the path for my ingress,
Who sowed words into my mouth,
Who heartened the motion,
Who directed the play.

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My people who are brainwaves for me to think
& to rethink of fitting this torn off leaf
back into the great manuscript
of the existential drama.

T… H… A… N… K… S…

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The world is not only queerer than we imagine; it is queerer than we can imagine.

- John B.S. Haldane

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Irrespective of all that man has achieved about the world, mysteries about his own nature abound. Centuries of science and reasoning have not succeeded in settling problems related to the notion of self. Recent developments in the study of self have promised improved exchange of ideas between Philosophy of Mind and other empirical sciences and findings in the cognitive sciences have rekindled the fascination for knowledge of self among writers, philosophers, scientists, psychologists, and the common man, and as a result, the philosophical debates on self are relooked with new vigour and improved insights.

Arguments for the non-existence of a permanent, immaterial, and substantial self seem to be convincing in the recent academic writings more than ever in the light of empirical findings about the human nature. But it is an unmistaken fact that people still hold on to the sense of an essential being within, which renders sort of unity and permanence to the changing nature of man, at least on moral grounds if not metaphysical. Even though one might appreciate intellectually the illusory nature of the self, the sense of an enduring being within refuses to wither away emotionally. Bracketing all circumstantial and contextual expressions of the inconsistencies and contradictions within individuals, even including the ever renewing nature of the biological body, one believes to find a "pure me" somewhere there within. Looked at from an evolutionary point of view, this must have significant survival value. The possession of the concept of a self is important because it enables me to think of my ideas and emotions, my plans and aspirations, my hopes and fears, as *mine—as belonging* to me, and the proper focus of *my* self-interest.[1]

Considering the magnanimity of the notion of self, the self-creating processes and their constitutive mechanisms should equally be intriguing. We must accept that there are more problems and concerns associated with the notion of self than there are conclusive answers. The first problem that anyone would come across in a philosophical study of self is its very existence – what is the state of self prior to *my* experiences? Was there a given ontologically distinctive, substantial entity somewhere abiding within *me* before *I* started perceiving the world as *mine*? Or is the self something that emerges from the experienced content of my mind – an autobiography that is woven by the mine-ness attached to different perceptions?

[1] Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul*, p. 191.

If there is no enduring self, a charioteer to occupy the chariot, as asserted by different philosophical systems and science, then for whose sake should there be a chariot and this arduous war of survival and preservation? And in the absence of an all knowing subject: how is the organism capable of knowing itself and what mechanisms make it possible for one to say "I am stout" rather than "my body is stout"?; and, how are the memories of yesterday placed alongside the thoughts of today and dreams of tomorrow made belong to the same individual?

Assuming that self is a constructed notion, we stumble upon another serious concern. Since nothing can abruptly begin, it becomes pertinent to ask as to who constructs such a concept and when does it precisely begin its operations? What is it like to be a neonatal, and when and how does an infant become a person? Also it is important to look at the role of "the other" in the constitution of our self-concept. How are we products of culture and society? How much does the society assist or influence in the formation, development and maintenance of self-concepts? Are we really free to plot our own self-concepts?

If a minimal self is understood to be immediate subject of experience, un-extended in time, what is its relation with the narrative self, which is considered to be more or less a coherent self constituted with a past and a future? Do they operate independently of each other or does a causal relation exist between the two? If minimal selves are the streams or the building blocks of autobiographical selves, how are they fit into the larger frame? What are the precise neuronal mechanisms involved in the process of self-constitution? What are the roles played by different brain regions in getting the unrelated and contradictory experiences fit into a coherent and consistent narrative? If there are different contextual narrations, what mechanisms at the psychological level integrate or adjudicate these diverse constitutions in order to create the seemingly consistent oneness?

Questions abound when it comes to the notion of self, and what we have are more assumptions and beliefs than answers. We shall take a short survey of the major areas or issues that will be focussed upon in this work.

Debate on the Existence of Self

The age-old debate on the existence of self remains open with philosophers arguing for both the extremes. The unfailing commitment to an enduring entity within has stood ground amidst great philosophical onslaughts and continues to enjoy its place of honour even in a

world of advanced sciences. The pouring in of hitherto unknown knowledge on human nature has not helped humanity much in getting relieved from this belief. But there are also philosophers who argue that the sense of self is illusory and there are no permanently existing selves. Because arguments for a substantial self pacify the average minds, and since the subjective character of consciousness gives rise to sense of a persistent self – that is, the felt sense of being a stable *who*, or owner of conscious episodes – it does not follow that this *who* should really exist in any autonomous or enduring sense,[2] they argue. Philosophers like Shaun Gallagher are of the opinion that an extended self is simply a fiction, albeit a useful one because it lends a practical sense of continuity to life, but a fiction nonetheless.[3]

The historical streams of philosophical debate on the existence of self can roughly be classified into three categories namely: substantialist, non-substantialist and no-self theories. While no-self theorists deny the existence of self in any form, substantialist and non-substantialst self theorists affirm its existence but disagree about its nature.[4] The substantialists consider self as a substance or property-bearer, or the substratum of constant changes, but the non-substantilists do not take self to be a property bearer or a substance distinct from consciousness. We see that the case of a soul-like substance is not taken seriously by many today, though its implications will be large as life, morality, and meaning all depend on that sense of perpetual endurance for authority and sanction. Questions on the very purpose of life might return to haunt us in the absence of an entity to provide us with just that permanence.

Even in the absence of a permanent entity within, there is this undeniable sense of permanence and stability in the persons that we are. We experience ourselves to be unified and temporally continuing persons, agents living out in the world as same yesterday and today. We realise significant others in the society recognising us as such and reciprocating with us with the same assurance that we will remain the same persons in the days to come. At the least, at the mundane level the relative permanence of persons has to be agreed upon for every practical and ethical purpose. It might be the case that there aren't any immaterial Cartesian selves inside us to be discovered, but we are persons nevertheless, having the sense of being temporally persistent beings. Considering the sense of self an illusion or fiction does not mean that it is simply not there, it may not be just what we take it to be.

[2] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 27.
[3] Gallagher, "Philosophical conceptions of the self", p. 19.
[4] Siderits, et. al. (eds.), *Self, No self?*, p.4.

We assume that self is *something* and it exists as there is a difference between having a sense of self and not having one - the second being considered an exception and pathology in humans. However, to deny or affirm something, one needs to be certain about its nature and therefore, it becomes necessary to clarify what one means by *self*. A definition of the self has to be made possible. The concept of self is multifaceted and we come to know that the locus of contention in the contemporary debates on "self or no self" is the very nature of self. What do I mean by self, which I then got to deny or affirm? We will look closely at different aspects of self, a term so loosely used that the usage itself has created a lot of confusion. At the minimum, we could easily distinguish between *selves* and *persons*.

The neonate could easily be distinguished from a grown up as far as their concept of personhood is considered. The infant, though not a person in the strict sense, is but a self (minimal to be precise) by all means – an immediate subject of phenomenological experiences, co-durable with them, non-conscious and non-temporal. Similarly, persons who fail to register memories for long durations for reasons of brain anomalies, and hence are unable to execute pictures of their lives are very much subjects of experiences with first-person perspective, but not persons with a history or plans for the future. The concept of minimal self may be understood to be something given, one that defines one's boundary, control, predispositions, and inclination for self-preservation etc. Biological self may be an example of this.

Minimal selves could be differentiated from the concept of autobiographical selves or persons who are extended in time, having a history and plans for the future. We note that "it might help to mark a conceptual distinction between the notions of 'self' (i.e. the immediate, moment-to-moment experience of being a first-person perspective on the world) and 'person' (i.e. the broader experience of being an entity that endures through time)."[5] John Locke expects three essential qualities to make an entity a person: rationality; self awareness; and the linkage of this self awareness by memory across time and space.[6] Persons are different from minimal selves for the reason that they are temporal and conscious. According to Damasio, autobiographical selves are autobiographies made conscious[7] – they are rational,

[5] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 38.
[6] For Locke, a person is: "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it." (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* p. 335.)
[7] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind,* p. 210.

conscious and temporal. The relation between minimal and temporal selves has to be seen as well – does autobiographical self emerge from the mine-ness of experiences that the minimal self enables, we need to ask.

From Pre-reflective Selves to Narrative Persons: the Narrator's becoming

The emerging nature of self, an abstract projection resulting from the process of narration, might be what gives us this sense of relative permanence. And it might be due to the history of our erroneous thinking and felt consistency that we take this emergent abstraction to be something real and distinctively existing – a subject of our myriad of experiences. Since we don't just reason – we tell stories about how we reason[8] - it follows that "[w]ho we are is a story of our self – a constructed narrative that our brain creates"[9]. The secrets to our leap towards humanness might also be found in our ability to tell stories as opined by Dennett:

> *Our* fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is not building dams or spinning webs, but telling stories--and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others--and ourselves--about who we are.[10]

Though narrative accounts of the self seem better and practical in explaining the origins and nature of self-notions, they also seemingly do not escape from certain questions. Since nothing begins abruptly, the story should have a background, a beginning, and someone to initiate and direct the narrative. How does the process begin and how does the novelist emerge out of its own story?

Minimal self is a more rudimentary notion of self that is looked upon with much interest and hope in the contemporary literature and is proposed to tackle the humble beginnings of humanness. This is a momentary self, available even before the process of narration begins, without long-term continuity and thus without a history. It is a self that every being with the capacity to feel is - "a kind of bare locus of consciousness, void of personality",[11] is what Strawson calls it. It is given to understand that "…the minimal self is something I can fail to

[8] MacIntyre, "After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory", p. 201.
[9] Hood, *The Self Illusion,* p. xi.
[10] Dennett, "The Origin of Selves".
[11] Strawson, "The Self and the SESMET", p.108.

articulate (i.e. give narrative expression to), but something that I cannot fail to be."[12] This has to be a state of being-ness, fundamental to every subject of experiences.

We could probably look at the state of affairs in the life of an infant here as an example. It is evidenced in studies on the neonates that they are able to have phenomenological experience, even though we do not know when they exactly begin to connect these episodes and start threading their stories. Human infants come with first person perspectives and are born with sense of bodily boundaries and internal disposition to learn, imitate and control. The sense of individuality, that they are unique to the world like the many that they encounter around them, slowly emerges. Though they are agents with crude self functions and the capacity to register experiences as unrelated episodes, they lack the storytelling ability. It is something that they come to develop and the story of their life begins.

The existence of pre-reflective momentary selves is also made evident in cases of severe pathologies of self. In some neurological pathologies people lose their sense of self and end up having de-realization or depersonalization – they cease to exist as themselves, being alive and otherwise healthy all the while in many cases. Cases have also been reported of individuals who are incapable of forming narrative selves due to drastic form of memory loss.[13] There are also persons with unfortunate damages to certain brain areas that they are unable to form unified concepts of self, living ever-new-lives of momentariness, unexteneded in time, unconnected to the past and the future. They very well experience every moment of their phenomenological existence as subjects but cannot experience themselves as persons existing temporally in the past and the future. We assume from what is evidenced in various pathologies of self, that in normal cases, it might be from the subjectivity and the sense of ownership and agency associated with the experiences that the sense of self emerges – of course, assisted with our language using capacity and the skills to narrate.

Coming to the relation between the minimal selves and the temporal selves, it becomes important for us to see if there a causative relation existing between the phenomenological pre-narrrative selves and the temporally extended autobiographical selves. Are they causally related? The first-person perspective, or the subject to whom the world is given in a first-personal mode of presentation, is phenomenologically and ontologically prior to the narrative

[12] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, p. 116.
[13] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, p. 118.

self[14] and are possible even without the existence of narrative selves, but not the other way round. Hence, we tend to speculate that the pre-narrative selves are structures or building blocks of autobiographical selves, or the narrative personhood. And if we understand pre-narrative selves to be the fundamental constituting factors, based on which the story of our lives are woven, we may understand a human being as consisting of multiple series of such transient selves, each one lasting only as long as a unique period of experience lasts, coming into existence and going out of existence, without continuity.[15]

It seems that we are all novelists of our own story - a story formed of the numerous experiences that we come to record and store - and that the entire process of conscious narration is self-regulated and that there is no central figure who is directing the whole game; rather, the director figure must be one emerging out of the autonomous process of narration, as opined by Dennett: "...*we*, (unlike *professional* human storytellers) do not consciously and deliberately figure out what narratives to tell and how to tell them; like spider webs, our tales are *spun by us*; our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their *product*, not their *source".*[16] The protagonist might be an outcome of that story we thread and narrate about the organism and its relation with the world, for ourselves and for others. Self-construction is social in nature and depends to a great extent on the significant *others* around us and on their intentions. Ricoeur asserts that "...selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought without the other".[17] In the words of Bruce Hood, a developmental psychologist,

> [i]n humans, not only do we learn from others about the world around us, we also learn to become a self. In the process of watching others and trying to understand them, we come to discover who we are. During these formative years, the illusion of the reflected self we experience is constructed by those around us through our social interactions.[18]

For the narrative process to happen, for individuals to begin the autobiographical accounts of their lives, they should be able to appreciate the presence of other characters about them. The story is largely made for the others around, though one does not realise the significance that it holds for herself. Also, appreciating and reciprocating to others would not be possible

[14] Siderits, et. al.(eds), *Self, No Self?*, p. 38.
[15] Gallagher, "Philosophical Conceptions of the Self", Pp.17-18.
[16] Dennett, "The Origin of Selves".
[17] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 3.
[18] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 26.

without developing a notion of their own minds as evidenced by the difficulty faced by children with autism. In the case of normal children,

> [o]ver the course of early childhood, typical children increasingly become more sophisticated at understanding other people because of their developing theory of mind. … [b]y four years of age, children have become expert at working the social arena. They will copy, imitate, mimic and generally empathize with others, thereby signalling that they too are part of the social circles that we all must join in order to become members of the tribe. They share the same socially contagious behaviours of crying, yawning, smiling, laughing and showing disgust.[19]

Here we announce the entry of another person into the social arena – it is a *person* now, no longer subject of unrelated phenomenological experiences. Once the process of weaving those unrelated phenomenological experiences into beautiful human stories of unity and continuity is all set, the role of an editor cannot be marginalised. There has to be an editor who interprets facts and situations, suppresses unwanted and unfitting material, keeps track of the new inputs, and importantly reframes the existing material according to the new data and information received. Who does that? Is it internally or externally motivated and controlled? The controller might be the society as well. While analysing the role of the society in the formation and maintenance of the individual self-concepts, we could also doubt if we are really in control of the stories that we frame. May be, the impact is profound and it is the larger society that makes us – we aren't in actual control.

So, all that we initially are, are minimal selves, subjects of unrelated first-personal experiences of the world. Interpreting them and threading them into meaningful narratives is a different process, albeit on the foundations of these phenomenological experiences. This is a point that has to be seriously looked into. Equally fascinating is the whole process of narrative constitution of the self and we do not know for clear the mechanisms that underlie our process of storytelling. We will also be analysing the neuronal mechanisms that assist in the editing process. It seems that our stories are socially and biologically constrained and controlled.

With the advancement of technology, Neuroscience has contributed significantly to the questions on the neuronal bases of consciousness and self-knowledge and it is expected to tell us the difference between persons and non-persons. Damasio has written extensively on the

[19] Ibid., p. 65.

neural structures and mechanisms required for the formation of autobiographical selves. If we are to understand personhood as a property that comes to be and its constitutive mechanisms, insights from these empirical sciences may have to be critically examined and appreciated.

Nature and the Neural Bases of Autobiographical Selves

Though the society influences what we are to be, the real process takes place in the three pound jelly within the head. At each moment the state of self is constructed from the ground up. It is an evanescent reference state, so continuously and consistently *re*constructed that the owner never knows it is being *re*made unless something goes wrong with the remaking.[20] The process of registering events, image formation, the origin of an autobiographical self, and the correlating neuronal changes in the brain are attempted an explanation by neuroscientists like Antonio Damasio and V.S. Ramachandran. It is true that science has come a long way, and we have got better access into the hitherto mysterious chambers of the brain with the assistance of advanced technology. But, neuroscience being in its infancy, all that we can know about the brain is that certain parts of the brain are more involved in the process of creating a self than the other parts of the brain. The input regarding this is given to us from research on the pathologies of self and the empirically found and scientifically informed speculations that scientists make.

Based on studies conducted on persons with disabilities in creating a sense of self, we might assume or speculate that the process of self-constitution is well rooted in the brain and the proper functioning of the brain is a prerequisite for the development and sustenance of a healthy personhood. But what are these processes and which of the brain regions are closely involved in the creation of personhood? May be the sense of self that most of us experience is not to be found in any one area of the brain, but might be emerging out of the orchestra of different brain processes like a symphony of the self, just as Buddha and Hume said.[21] It is not only in the creation of a self-concept but also in its maintenance and modification that the brain has a role to play. The number of defence mechanisms that we use for making our self narratives coherent and socially acceptable show just that. Our memories are modified and, at times, our narratives take different routes having the end objective of presenting ourselves as beautiful stories to the world, to be appreciated and celebrated.

[20] Damasio, *Descartes' Error,* p. 240.
[21] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. x.

Even as persons are conceived as temporal narratives, there are differences in the approaches towards the nature of these narrative selves. We will look at two models about the nature of narrative persons: one offered by Daniel Dennett, and another by Paul Ricoeur. Dennett defines self as an abstract centre of narrative gravity according to which, the individual self consists of the abstract and movable points where the various stories that the individual tells about himself, or are told about him, meet up.[22] But the model proposed by Ricoeur, is more extended and distributed, in which, self is not an abstract centre but an extended self which is de-centered and distributed. It is more of an active agent and can contain a lot of multiplicities and contradictions in its fold.[23] This debate on the fictional or realistic nature of self is to be examined. Empirical research conducted on various pathologies of self like lose of self-concept, inability to form concept of self, existence of multiple personalities within a single body, sense of cosmic self etc. would hopefully be of great help in understanding the nature of self.

Our attempt to find an answer to the real nature of oneself may find no immaterial entity within. In bouts of introspection we come across fleeting impressions, beliefs and convictions alone. The foundations of "I" might be built on momentary, ever renewing phenomenological subjective experiences. We weave our stories with these impermanent threads and redesign the existing ones with the new materials received, but all in consistency and continuity, ever giving away a sense of permanence. As Shaun Gallagher hopes, by extending the ideas of a narrative self, we are perhaps coming closer to a concept of the self that can account for the findings of the cognitive sciences and neurosciences, as well as our own experience of what it is to be a continuous, phenomenological self.[24] This understanding of self may solve issues like identity crisis, tensions between the real self and the ideal self, and may help in understanding religion, politics and caste as identity builders. It would be a study to get a comprehensive view of the nature of self and its origin. By considering this research project as a neurophilosophical enquiry, we will be looking into the claim of neuroscience that persons are constructed concepts and then critically evaluating the same to see how far it is philosophically valuable and tenable.

This work is an attempt at understanding the origin and the nature of the reflective self. Dwelling shortly on the debate on the "Yes" or "No" of self's existence as a substantial

[22] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity".
[23] Gallagher, "Philosophical conceptions of self", p. 20.
[24] Ibid.

enduring entity, the study will move on to understand the alternative approaches. Though the area is vast and the literature on the topic is voluminous, the research would limit itself to the question "how the illusion of an enduring self emerges from nowhere in a bundle of matter and how is it sustained?". We start with the assumption that a human person is a narrative and every individual is an auto-biographer, constantly restructuring and improving the character of the protagonist, the novelist himself/herself. Once argued and proven that personhood is an emergent property, its origin and nature will be looked into. Insights from neuroscience and Developmental Psychology will be borrowed in understanding the process of scripting the autobiography and the nature of the auto-biographer.

Considering the immense literature on the topic, the first chapter of the present work will be devoted to understanding a few major thoughts in the history of Philosophy on the problem of self, categorising them roughly into substantial self theories, non-substantial self theories and no-self theories. If substantialist accounts of self could be defeated logically, various constructivist theories about the origin of the sense of self will be looked into as alternatives to justify the unmistaken sense of self. An elaborate discussion of the autobiographical account of self-constitution is proposed in the second chapter. Concepts like self, person, minimal self and autobiographical selves and the causal relation existing between the minimal subjects of experience and the temporally located persons will be analyzed in detail. Insights from developmental psychology will be applied in understanding the role that society plays in evolving an infant into a person.

In the third chapter, we will try understanding the neural structures and mechanisms involved in the creation of self-concept and various brain pathologies that lead to distorted or absence of self-concepts. It will also discuss the problem of self reflectivity and how it is made possible for the brain to know itself. Debate on the role of various brain regions involved in the constitution of self will be dealt with while asking if the *I* could be located somewhere in the brain. The final chapter will be devoted for a general understanding of the nature of persons so formed through brain processes and socio-cultural influences. We will look at how narratives enhance the transition of minimal selves into temporal persons and the role that defence mechanisms have in making the story coherent and appreciable. Narrative accounts of self according to Dennett and Ricoeur will be discussed in detail and insights from psychology will be taken into account in understanding the role that the society has in the formation, maintenance and sustenance of the self-concept.

Know thy self, know thy enemy. A thousand battles, a thousand victories.

- Sun Tzu

Chapter One

Introducing Philosophical Debates on the Existence and Nature of Self

Chapter One

Introducing Philosophical Debates on the Existence and Nature of Self

1.1. Introduction

If wonder is the sprouting point of philosophy, wondering 'who I am' is precisely its defining point. Unfortunately, even after centuries of reasoning and science, our ignorance of self is colossal. Brilliant minds have worked on the nature of self and the concept has been conscientiously debated - getting mystified, diluted, reframed, and even negated in the process - and at the end all that we have achieved, if any, are wide perspectives and better clarity as to what we are exactly looking for. Being part of that incessant process, varied opinions have reached us on the origin and nature of self today.

We will begin the chapter by looking at the notion of self in general and then move on to a few specific philosophical problems that have been repeatedly debated in the history of Philosophy and remain unanswered. We will try in this chapter to discuss in detail how at least one of them, the existence or non-existence of self, has historically been looked at. It will introduce to us different perspectives of the notion of self and provide us with a working knowledge of what we are trying to understand. We will then try to clear the notion off its ambiguity and move on to discuss elaborately other problems related to the notion of self in the following chapters.

1.2. Introducing the Notion of Self

Notion of self must have the distinction of being the most convincing and the most dubious concept at the same time. Belief in the existence of a persisting self has been so remarkable that the large masses do not even consider this to be a problem at all. If one is not certain of one's own existence and nature, what else can anyone probably be about, they ask. The edifice of modern philosophy has been built on similar argumentative foundations. But, the most useful construction of man, one of the strongest illusions, falls apart like a castle of cards when gazed upon with the eagerness to define it.

Irrespective of the commonsensical beliefs in the existence and the nature of self, philosophical brains of all ages have struggled at explaining the problem. Socrates started his philosophical mission with the pronouncement of the Delphic oracle 'Man! Know thyself'

and the rationale of the Indian *Upanishadic* teaching was '*atmanam viddhi'* (know thyself). But this has never been an easy task. While various branches of sciences have revolutionized man's understanding of the intricacies in the functioning of the natural world, there has not been any particular branch specializing on the subject matter of man. Even though *self* has been a question bothering mankind for ages and different disciplines have come up with suggestive explanations, the fact remains that the amalgamation of all that isn't adequate for explaining the concrete being that man is; there isn't any scientific theory of humanness yet. The problem of self has traditionally been considered a philosophical problem with its branches taking various aspects of the notion for rigorous scrutiny. If Ontology questions the existence of self, Metaphysics deals with its nature. If Epistemology questions our capability and methods of knowing it, Ethics deals with the implications of its existence or non-existence.

The non-human animals probably do not ask if it is their "body with a nervous system" or a "transcendental unity of apperception", or "an eternal, spiritual, substantial being" residing in them etc. that makes possible any sensible experience of the world for them. Man is puzzled certainly by his knowledge of this ability for reflective reasoning - the ability to be self-conscious. And if thought sets man apart, it necessarily demands equally exceptional explanations. It must have been mainly for the urge to explain his mysterious nature with an equally mysterious answer that man invented the notion of a permanently existing soul, something in him that was invisible, unchanging, and absent among other animal species. He logically concluded that *this being* / the soul / the thinking substance, was the substratum of his reason, unique emotions, and herald of immortality. This line of thought was established in the western world, especially in the Church circles, that human bodies had exotic occupants in them and that they were immortal and immaterial – reasons for human traits like morality, immortality, self-consciousness etc. could not simply be mechanical and finite.

Along with the urge to prove man superior to the other animals, there were also precise philosophical problems that opened up debates on the existence of a soul-like substance. How does matter, divisive and perishable could give rise to thought that is immaterial, indivisible and pristine? This is quite the problem tormenting philosophers of mind even today. How can immaterial qualities of consciousness and thought be accounted for by physical bodies? In the absence of definite answers, man was possibly pressed into vouching for a substance; a substance whose essence being pure thought, could make human thought possible. It was

conceived to be unextended and therefore indivisible, immortal, and perfect. "I" am this unextended thought, for, I could imagine myself without any part of the extended body at any time but never without thought, Descartes argued.

> "I have a clear and distinct idea of myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on the other, I possess a distinct idea of body, inasmuch as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that this I [that is to say, my soul by which I am what I am], is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it."[1]

Though it is the felt necessity to bring an immaterial substance into an otherwise beautifully explained schema of mechanical world that makes the question of human nature an interesting topic, the naturalist philosophers have tried ardently to avoid it for the philosophical difficulties it involves - capturing of celestial beings in earthly bodies isn't philosophically tenable. Moreover, with empirical sciences to its assistance, philosophy as a discipline has evolved much in seeking to answer terrestrial problems with empirical solutions. Man has started looking around than above in search of himself. And understanding of human being as an organism that experiences and relates to the world around has brought in new found vigour to the project of decoding man, not only in philosophy but in many other disciplines too.

Nevertheless, the problem of self continues to torment the philosophical world. Questions that warranted possible existence of an immaterial substance have remained without much reform though answers have changed names and manners. As the concept of *soul* attracted great disdain in the academic world, more elaborate and equally undefined concepts like *mind* or *self* have entered the scene, the purpose and end of all being much the same. Constructing alternative explanations to these questions is not as easy as doing away with concepts like soul and we should accept that to this day no commendable or exhaustive explanations have been offered for what we are – what makes man unique.

Every discussion on the human nature is still attended positively by the Cartesian ghost, haunting thoughts of the theorists, no matter how forcefully they try to move away from a dualistic understanding. The assumed *extraterrestrial* being withstands exorcising arguments for the inexplicability of human nature and lack of satisfactory alternatives. The debate on human nature refuses to recede: if there is a substance other than the physical body, then its

[1] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Pp. 27-28.

relation with the body has to be explained; and if there is none, then matter's ability to self-reflect. And philosophers find difficulty in giving exhaustive explanations to these in purely physicalist terms.

We see the sixteenth and seventeenth century rise of modern science turning much of the existing philosophy upside down. The scientific spirit, that considered the universe to be a gigantic machine with no need for a director or purpose, naturally crept into the human sciences as well. With hitherto unseen changes occurring in the academic and cultural world after the Second World War, the concept of self was torn into demarcated specialisations across disciplines and was left seemingly in an impossible world of multiplicity and today it seems difficult to pinpoint a particular defining property of self from myriad of its diverse aspects. Surprisingly, this was all happening to a concept that had survived with rock-like solidity many centuries of intellectual onslaught. The fall of *self* into fragmented areas of speculation and research had been so fast and violent that even today it becomes uncomfortable for many to think of self as a fictional creation. Hopes for a unified self or an immortality-heralding-spiritual-entity refuses to be exorcised.

1.3. Major Dimensions of Self

Though attempts for framing a unified theory of self are ever enthusiastically carried on even today, the concept of self can no longer be approached from a single perspective and any serious attempt needs to focus on the three essential and interdependent dimensions of self.

Mysteries of reasoning and consciousness have ensured that the question of self/soul/mind remains relevant to any discussion on human nature and that the contemporary philosophers face the same insurmountable walls that Plato or Descartes tried mounting with these concepts in their baskets. Today no one approaches self from a single perspective, thanks to its mysterious nature. John Barressi and Raymond Martin while reviewing the prolonged history of debates on the existence and nature of self across centuries have proposed mainly three dimensions to be considered essential in understanding any notion of self: ontological, experiential, and, relational.[2] Ontological dimension of self had been the main focus of traditional debates, with experiential and relational dimensions coming up to supplement it later on.

[2] Barressi and Martin, "History as Prologue – Western Theories of the Self", Pp. 53- 54.

1.3.1. Ontological Dimension of Self

Ontological dimension of self does not focus much on the experience of the self-concept or the social realities that it is engulfed in, but on its very existence. Though human nature, human agency and morality, and possibility of human immortality all seem to warrant the safe existence of a self traditionally considered to be immaterial and immortal, this has always been a topic of philosophical contention. Ontological dimension of self is all about the bare possibility of its existence.

The Platonic tradition argued that there was an immaterial substance, separate and independent of the body, but captive in it – the soul. The Christian religion followed suit, making it the foundation of human perfection and immortality. Schools of thought vehemently arguing against such lines of thought and stressing the non-existence of anything other than the physical body were struggling to survive the ardent attack from the defending armies of the soul all the while.

The unstoppable advancement of the natural sciences has later come to reassert the dormant thoughts of the ancient materialists. A complex physical mechanism was now reconsidered as the secret behind man's mysterious thinking nature and was enthroned to its rightful position. Contemporary thinkers have started looking more courageously at self as a properly functioning organism and a mind-process made possible by it. Unlocking the mechanisms that underlie the undeniable sense of self has tempted philosophers as a possible method of answering problems related to the existence and nature of self. But there had always been traditions that have looked at not only methods but the very notion of self with serious suspicion.[3] The problem on the existence of self has been looked at differently and so have the methods employed in unravelling it. We will look elaborately at these debates in the later sessions of the chapter.

1.3.2. Experiential Dimension of Self

Self as an experiential and relational entity has found larger interest in recent times, thanks to the venturing of various disciplines into the foray of understanding the notion. The

[3] For example, "Indian philosophical investigations of the self begins with the suspicion that the sense of self that everyone seems to have might be importantly mistaken—indeed that this might be the cause of our being bound to the wheel of *samsara* or beginningless rebirth. So while our commonly acknowledged sense of self might be worth investigating, we should not assume that doing so will lead directly to an understanding of what the self is." (Siderits, et. al. (eds.), *Self, No self?*. P. 3.)

experiential dimension of self looks what one's self-experience is like - a first-person experiential account. It does not seek to know what the self is like, but its experiencing, what it is for me as an individual organism to have the experience of being one such. "Every conscious state, be it a perception, an emotion, a recollection, or an abstract belief, has a certain subjective character, a certain phenomenal quality of "what it is like" to live through, or undergo that state. This is what makes the mental state in question *conscious."*[4] Beyond all the general neuronal mechanisms underlying consciousness as such, there is a subjective way that I experience it, which belongs to me alone in a unique first person perspective.

Self is not something that "exists apart from, or above, the experience and, for that reason, is something that might be encountered in separation from the experience",[5] phenomenologists like Zahavi argues and it is generally accepted that there is more to conscious experiences than that they are immediately and non-objectually manifested in experience; that they have the egological content added to them. "[M]y tacit awareness of a particular conscious experience includes, *ipso facto*, a tacit awareness of myself as subject of that experience. This means that a subject, in perceiving x (thinking about *x* etc.), is tacitly aware of *herself* perceiving *x*."[6]

What matters is that I become conscious of experiencing myself as a distinct being in every experience - a being with a concept of being a self, with a way of being such, no matter whether that self is an immaterial substance, a useful fiction, or an illusion. I experience my *self* to be myself, and that is important for my existence as a being as such. This is true even of a person with no conscious history or no immediate plans of a future like a neonate.

> ... [n]eonates come into the world with a proprioceptive self: a minimal form of self-awareness emerging from very basic experiences of themselves as embodied and situated creatures. ... [s]ince neonates lack the linguistic capacities needed to construct and comprehend narratives, they have no sense of themselves as narrative entity, that is, as a person. Nevertheless, neonates imitation research indicates that a minimal sort of self-experience, the sense of being a unified, embodied perspective on the world, is present from birth.[7]

Our concern is also how this experience is made possible for the human organism and how significant that is to human existence.

[4] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood.* P.119.
[5] Ibid., p.126.
[6] Janzen, "Review of Dan Zahavi's *Subjectivity and Selfhood*".
[7] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", Pp. 40-41

> "According to Zahavi, a mental state is conscious only if it is "lived through" in such a way that the subject is immediately and non-objectively acquainted with it as hers. But it might be objected that it is altogether unclear how a subject can become acquainted with a mental state in the appropriate way if not by virtue of having a higher-order thought or perception about it."[8]

We try to explain the experience of being unique individuals and the mechanisms making it possible under the experiential dimension of self.

1.3.3. Relational Dimension of Self

Attempting to conceive the concept of self independently of society would be an impossible prospect. We have come to agree lately that it is in comparison with the other, in one's social interaction, that any concept of a self emerges from. The social dimension of self precisely emphasises this aspect - the significance of social interaction in the origin, development, and maintenance of self-awareness and self-concept, beginning from infancy.

> How do we develop a sense of self in the first place? How do children develop an understanding of what others think and, more importantly, what they think about them? This must be especially important during that most difficult time of adolescence when children try to find their true self. How is our identity shaped by the characteristics that are imposed on us by biology and cultural stereotypes? All of these questions reflect upon the sense that the self is defined by those around us.[9]

Self-concepts are often understood to be reflections on the mirror that a society holds up to one. The reflective nature of society forces self-emerging and self-concept formation. Every human organism is born into a history, larger narratives in which one struggles to find a role for oneself. The social engagement and the larger narrative background must be forces that grant some kind of temporality to otherwise subjects of unrelated phenomenological experiences. Society also ensures continuous maintenance and strenuous modifications to one's self-concept. And every culture has a peculiar way of understanding the human self. The relational dimension of self thus focuses more on the temporal "person" aspect of the individual, taking into account the relevance of ethical notions and social wellbeing in his interaction with the society.

[8] Janzen, "Review of Dan Zahavi's *Subjectivity and Selfhood*".
[9] Hood, *The Self Illusion,* Pp. 51-52.

There have been attempts at understanding the self, placing emphasis on each of these dimensions or on a combination of them. While emphasis on the ontological dimension has led to metaphysical debates about the nature of self and corresponding debates about the existence or non-existence of a substantial self, the experiential dimension of self has led to the phenomenological understanding of self as a being capable of experiencing and being conscious of the world, bringing it down to the world of physiology. Emphasis on the relative dimension of the self has given rise to many social theories on the origin of self, like the constructivist and narrative accounts.

Keeping in mind these three dimensions of the self, we can now enter into the historical debate regarding the existence of self in the next session. While placing the problem of self historically, we will see certain philosophical issues showing up and thus setting stage for further discussions on the other two dimensions of self in the coming chapters.

1.4. Philosophical Problems of the Notion of Self

Though we speak of the notion of self with quite ease, this possibility changes once we try defining it; it eludes human reason and remains a mysterious subject. In fact, the attempt is to understand the nature of something whose very existence is at stake. The question "is there a self and if yes, what is its nature?" has ever remained inconclusive. If there is a distinctive self-substance as has been traditionally agued for, its relation to the physical body calls for an explanation, and if not, the human body is demanded of answers to its own sublime nature. In the second case, the difficulty becomes all the more evident, for, if we argue that there is nothing other than the human body and its functions, then we have to justify the origin of human nature and its functioning from a purely physicalist point of view.

As far as the notion of self is concerned, there are other serious philosophical problems too: will uncovering the underlying structure of the human sense of being particular persons across time, reveal to us the nature and secret of self or are we pursuing a misappropriated sense of being a self as the no-self theorists claim? Does being self-conscious always accompany some sort of pre-reflective self-consciousness and vouch for the existence of a self? How does subjectivity become possible without a subject? If the experiencing subject is a physical body without a persisting self in it, how does it succeed in placing the current content of consciousness in a constructed stream in continuation with the past and in anticipation to the potential future contents? If this be the case that there is no persisting self,

employed as the knower or agent, how is the body able to create conscious thoughts or how are we able to function as numerically and temporally identical persons even in the face of constant physiological changes?

We will look at a few serious concerns that philosophers face while trying to understand the notion of self. The answers to these problems, if there are any and if ever man is able to discover them, might dissolve the problem of self, like any other mystery that man has come to master either in the natural world or about himself. One of the major problems, the existence of self, will be dealt with in detail in this chapter and others in chapters three and four.

1.4.1. The Existence of Self

It is the very existence of self as a persistent and enduring entity that one stumbles upon on a serious course to understand its nature. When one uses the first person pronoun 'I', it is surely after taking for granted the existence of something which is referred to by the same. This '*something*' is such that everyone is so certain about that any question about its existence sounds superfluous and a mockery unless one really understands the gravity of the issue. We are, at the least, sure of the necessity of having *I* as an investigator even to question its existence. If we can be so certain about, how are we going to define the problem that we will be discussing about?

When one enters into a debate on the existence or non-existence of self, one has to make clear what one is trying to negate or affirm. Herein, are we making reference, by *self/I*, to the body that keeps on changing, or to the unending thoughts and ideas fleeting within the body, or is it to some unchanging principle within us that functions as the substratum for all the changes that we undergo and can address the body as "my body"? What are we? We possibly cannot escape the notion of a self but can very well debate about its nature.

The most commonsensical notion of the self might be the one that was proposed by Plato or Descartes or by Christianity – a permanent immaterial substance existing in the body, which can even survive physical mortality. Though it is consoling and soothing for the average minds, such a notion has come to be rejected for all scientific and philosophic reasons. An alternative notion that existed simultaneously was the idea that there was no such persisting or immaterial self but the body alone, as claimed by the atomists or the physicalists. But it is clear that it is not the body that the personal pronoun 'I' refers to, for, we often speak of 'my

body'. Whose body is it then? There is still another alternative which in a loose way tries to argue that I am the endless flow of thoughts and experiences or I am the conscious thought. Again we refer to our mental states such as 'my thoughts and ideas'. It could also be alternatively claimed that 'I' is the product of, or a fictional protagonist framed out of the body's interaction with itself, the world, and the other.

The existence or non-existence of self has always caused significant debates in the philosophical world especially in the eastern traditions; and the contemporary debates make it clear that the question is far from being solved. A review of the philosophical literature on the topic shows that the philosophical positions on the question of self could be broadly categorized into Substantialist, Non- Substantialist and No-Self accounts. While No-Self theorists deny the existence of a self, Substantialist and Non-Substantialst self theorists affirm its existence but differ in ideas about its nature.[10] Though the classification of self theories into these three categories is not watertight and comprehensive, it might offer us some sort of an idea about the whole exercise of debating the topic of self. We will look at a few prominent philosophers and schools of thought in both Indian and Western tradition to have a broader and detailed understanding of the history of the debate on self.

1.4.1.1. Substantialist Theories of Self:

The most commonsensical answer to the puzzle of man's ability to be reflective and conscious might be found in the substantailist accounts of self. It takes everything human beyond the animal flesh, making him unique and immortal and gives his life purpose and meaning. In these accounts, self is considered to be spiritual, residing unseen; self-moving and indivisible, surviving physical death; and, simple and substantial, providing continuity to experiences. It is this eternal substance that identifies the physical body as "my body" and takes leave of it once it realises, by virtue of having thought and consciousness for its nature, its own pristine essence of being identical to the Supreme Being. Such primitive and universal views take self to be a persisting property bearer, substratum of all changes, and assurer of life, consciousness, unity of experience etc.[11]

[10] Siderits, et.al., (eds.), *Self, No Self?* P. 4.

[11] A single verse from the *Katha Upansihad* might summarise such views. "The intelligent Self is neither born nor does It die. It did not originate from anything, nor did anything originate from It. It is birthless, eternal, undecaying, and ancient. It is not injured even when the body is killed." (*Katha Upanishad,* 1.ii.18, p. 151.)

> A substantialist view is the one that takes the self to be a substance or property-bearer, the substrate in which different properties are located at one time or, for substances thought to persist, at different times. Taking as a model the common-sense idea of a thing as an entity that bears a variety of qualities, substantialist theorists see the self as at least minimally the subject of experience, that entity to which conscious states are given.[12]

It was Plato who proposed such a comprehensive dualistic theory about the human nature in the West for the first time and argued that man a provisory amalgam of two incongruent elements, soul and body; and of course he was more soul than body. His account of man was so rigorous that the credo of the largest religion in the world alleges its theological foundation to the Platonic understanding of man even today. The body along with its senses is not the real thing; moreover, it functions as the prison house of soul, Plato thought. Soul is the real being, next to the divine and it is for the soul that the human body is alive and sensibly functional. The claim is that "...either man is nothing at all, or if anything, he turns out to be nothing less than soul"[13], and the soul is entrapped in the material body and its release, through the contemplation of the real world of good, is the eventual aim of life, he thought.

> ... [i]t follows reason and ever stays with it contemplating the true, the divine, which is not the object of opinion. Nurtured by this, it believes that one should live in this manner as long as one is alive and, after death, arrive at what is akin and of the same kind, and escape from human evils.[14]

The soul, being imprisoned in the body seeks to gain knowledge of the absolute through the medium of the body but fails to grasp the Forms, the non-perceptible, eternal, unchanging objects of knowledge. The body is capable of perceiving things beautiful, equal, or good, but not of comprehending, the Universals like Beauty, Equality, or Goodness as such. Invisible but intelligible things being the destiny of the mind, it must pursue to detach and free itself from the prison house of the body and focus its attention on the real.

The immortality of the soul has been repeatedly and argumentatively placed by Plato. They say that the soul of man is immortal. At one time it comes to an end- that which is called death - and at another is born again, but it is never finally exterminated.[15] According to him, soul's simplicity and hence its indivisibility vouched for its immortality. In turn, this

[12] Siderits, et al. (eds.), *Self, No Self?,* P. 4.
[13] Plato, *Alcibiades,* I, 130c.
[14] Plato, *Phaedo,* 84a,b.
[15] Plato, *Meno,* 81b.

immortality made certain the pre-existence of the soul, existence prior to getting born in a body, and its personal survival of bodily death. Soul, he argued, also functions as the substratum for changes that the body undergoes, while it is alive and entrapped in a human body. The main arguments that Plato presents for the existence of an eternal soul, especially in the *Phaedo*, are mentioned below.

a) Plato's contention that the soul can exist without the body is well argued for in the *Phaedo*. One of the main arguments comes from the witnessing of opposites in the world. Things come from the opposites. As Socrates claims, we awaken from sleep and go back to sleep and then awake again. Similarly we move into the realm of life from death and go back to it. To make this possible, there should be a soul that remains alive in both life and death of the body and in the interim period. It is in the state of being freed from earthly life that the soul gets to have full glimpse of the unpolluted Universals, a possibility that sort of encourages the philosophical soul to die.

b) Everything that is composed of parts and is visible in the world, including the human body, is liable to disintegrate and perish. But the Universals are least affected by this perishing nature since they are Simple and true Unities. Socrates goes on to argue that the soul, which is invisible and not composite of parts, is therefore least likely to perish. The soul, in having constant consideration of the Forms and, in trying constantly to detach itself from the body, becomes like the Forms and outlasts the body to remain immortal.

c) The next argument comes in the form of pre-existing knowledge. Judgement upon anything requires that we have prior knowledge of the measuring standards. To decide if a painting of one's grandfather looks really like his grandfather, one needs to have the memory of having seen the old man before. From such a perspective Plato argues that it is from the prior comprehension of the Universal that the soul is able to make judgments on the particulars in the world even in childhood. Without having any notion of Equality, one would not be able to decide if two things were equal. This

> proves the claim that the soul must have existed prior to its getting entangled in the world of particulars.[16]

The concept of a spiritual and immortal soul gives man a sense of personal immortality and the possibility of returning to the world of life even after one's physical death. Thanks to these popular perceptions and the immense endorsement that Platonic ideas received at the hands of the Church theologians, the concept of soul as an immaterial and immortal substance proved to be outstandingly importunate, in spite of all the criticisms that the dualistic account had to face.

Notion of this self becomes clearer in the Christian philosophy. The hitherto understanding of the nature and ultimate end of the soul took a twist at the hands of the Church thinkers. As far as the development of the concept of soul/self is concerned, their views become important not only for the fact that a large number of people even today confirm their allegiance to such an understanding, but also, it gave new dimensions to human life and worldview. Man, of course, did not want to die, wanting to avoid the pain from time immemorial and the idea of a physical survival after death was as such alien to the Greek and Roman thought. With the strengthening of the concept of human soul as a divine entity, Christianity could not only answer temporal problems of man but also provide immense existential hope.

Though there were different views regarding the nature of soul and its immortality among the Church philosophers, with the dominant significance that Augustine assumed among them, other views slowly faded. Today the accepted view of the church about human nature is dualistic, having both physical and spiritual parts in it.

> The human body shares in the dignity of "the image of God". It is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, ... The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the "form" of the body: i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united; but rather their union forms a single nature.[17]

[16] "As the soul is immortal, has been born often, and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things." (Plato, *Meno* 81c and d); "Then if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to seek out and recollect what you do not know at present..." (Plato, *Meno*, 86b).
[17] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 364-365.

Man as a composite entity has both a body and a soul, and the soul is far superior to the body. Also the soul is immaterial and uses the body as an instrument. The body cannot move the soul but needs the soul to be moved. Augustine was of the opinion that the dogma of bodily resurrection requires that the soul and body together form an intimate unit: "A soul in possession of a body does not constitute two persons, but one man",[18] he argued. Augustine's views on soul and immortality became an integral and enduring dogma of Christianity and the continuation of the very same immaterial soul and the material body was considered a necessity for personal immortality to be possible.

Coming to modernity, Descartes gave a new direction to this line of thought. He has been considered the most famous defender of the soul in modern times. Soul was replaced in his thoughts, but not its character. He demarcated both mind and body with such clarity by distinguishing the properties of the two that joining them back conceptually would be a difficult task, even today.

One can imagine himself completely without conceiving about any human faculty but not without conceiving *oneself*, that is the intelligent substance in which all other faculties like imagination and perception reside. Even while seeing a body we might doubt its existence, but all the same, being sure that we think and certain about the existence of a thinking substance. He signifies the mind as a thinking thing and the body an extended thing. "But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and which also imagines and senses."[19] All that we can perceive clearly as our own nature is but this thought, anything else can be non-essential.

We clearly perceive that none of the properties that can be attributed to the body such as extension, figure or motion pertains essentially to our physical nature, Descartes argued. Any quantifiable property can be of the body, and not of the soul, an immaterial substance. "I enumerate the [extended] thing's various parts. I ascribe to these parts certain sizes, shapes, positions, and movements from place to place; to these movements I ascribe various durations."[20] Thus the notion we have about the mind precedes that we have of any corporeal thing.

[18] Augustine, *City of God*, p. 259.
[19] Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 63.
[20] Ibid., p. 85.

Having demarcated the two with such distinction he argues as to how they are related. In response to critics' view that the soul could be considered a pilot in charge of his ship, Descartes seems to have replied that the two form a single thing in virtue of their unity as a causal mechanism. Though the two are different substances, they are mingled in such a close way that the two end up making just a single thing. "I am present to my body not merely in the way a seaman is present to his ship, but, ... I am tightly joined and, so to speak, mingled together with it, so much so that I make up one single thing with it."[21]

It was Descartes who brought such a clear duality between mind and matter, an intrinsically challenging concept. The nature of the relation between the two is a demanding topic of debate in Philosophy even today. He proposes that though the soul is inseparably linked to the whole body in a distinct way, its seat of operation was in a small gland inside the human brain, through which it influenced the workings of the body.[22] The interaction between the body and the mind, which has been a piece of serious philosophical dispute, is argued to be bi-directional in Descartes.[23] The individual non-material minds and their respective bodies systematically affect each other, he believed.

Here are a few well thought arguments that Descartes presents for the independent nature of both mind and matter and for the immortality of the soul:

a) Taking into consideration the law of identity, that two things could be the same *iff* both of them have all the properties in common at any point in time, Descartes argues that body as an extended thing and mind as a thinking thing cannot be the same. Both the substances have different properties. In the argument from divisibility, he shows how the different parts of the body can be thought of conceptually separate like a hand or a leg. But in case of the mind, such a separation was impossible to be thought of. You can never imagine half a joy or parts of a desire, but the divisible part of the body: "... insofar as I am only a thing that thinks, I cannot distinguish any parts in me. ... Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, nevertheless, were a foot or an arm or any other bodily part amputated, I know that nothing would be

[21] Ibid., p.94.
[22] Descartes, *Descartes' Philosophical Writings,* p. 294.
[23] He claims that when the body is to be moved "...this volition causes the gland to impel the spirits towards the muscles which bring about this effect" (Ibid., p. 299.) and when light enters the body through the eyes of the animal it forms "... but one image on the gland, which, acting immediately on the soul, causes it to see the shape of the animal." (Ibid., Pp. 295-96.)

taken away from the mind ..."[24] Since, the property of divisibility is not found to be co-existing in both mind and body irrespective of their union, they both shall be separate things. As they possess different properties, they cannot be the same thing.

b) May be the most famous argument of Descartes for the existence of a thinking substantial thing was one based on the indubitable nature of the mind. The bodies have the possibility of being doubted inbuilt in them, but not the mind. Using again Leibnitz's law of identity, he argues that the two are distinct. Applying the famous method of doubt Descartes claims that the existence of the entire world could be doubtful. The existence of the physical world including that of my physical body could be an illusion brought in by a powerfully clever demon, whose nature is to deceit. But even in such scenarios the existence of the mind cannot be doubted as there should be a mind to be deceived. I am because I think, and I should be a non-bodily thing that thinks.

> [S]eeing that I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world nor any place where I was, but that I could not pretend, on that account, that I did not exist; and that, on the contrary, from the very fact that I thought about doubting the truth of other things, it followed very evidently and very certainly that I existed. ... From this I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which was merely to think, and which, in order to exist, needed no place and depended on no material things. Thus, this 'I,' that is, the soul through which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body....[25]

c) There is another argument that Descartes places for the separate existence of the mind. Since the two, body and mind, can be thought of independently and separate from each other, the two should be really distinct. The essences of the two are distinct and therefore they should really be separate and independent.

Descartes' method of doubt and his arguments were so clear that every time there is a discussion on the nature of the self, the Cartesian ghost arrives to haunt the thoughts of the theorists, no matter how forcefully they try to move away from a dualistic understanding of the human nature. This line of thought is one that the contemporary thinkers try to avoid; there aren't any serious takers for the substantialist accounts of self today, who think the self

[24] Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 97.
[25] Ibid., p.18.

to be a persisting entity substantially different from the human body. Though this view accounts for human nature and comes as a strong answer to man's longing for surviving physical death, on closer analysis, arguments for the existence of substantial selves fail to prevail over their critiques.

Selves as Substantial Beings: A Critique

The platonic arguments for the separate existence of the soul from the body are well challenged. The separability, independence and immortality of the soul do not get proved by the Platonic arguments and criticisms are present in the *Phaedo* itself. Argument from the opposites may not apply practically to the human condition. This argument applies to only those things that have proper opposites and Socrates claims that substances have no opposites. Though death comes from the living, it does not follow necessarily that the living human comes from the realm of the dead, that is, the separated soul and body. And it is not true that everything comes from the opposites in a bi-directional way. Though it is witnessed that the old comes off the young, its opposite process is not seen and may be, it is the same in the case of death as well. It could be a unidimensional process, where living persons die but dead persons do not return to live. Thus, the argument of opposites for the existence of the soul does not seem good enough to prove what it aims to.

The other two arguments that the soul must pre-exist for having some notion of the Universals and that, in having affinity towards the real, it must outlast the physical body, the existence of the Universals are presupposed. Therefore these arguments have to face all the criticisms that are raised against the Universals themselves.

> If those realities we are always talking about exist, the Beautiful and the Good and all that kind of reality, and we refer all the things we perceive to that reality, discovering that it existed before and is ours, and we compare these things with it, then, just as they exist, so our soul must exist before we are born. If these realities do not exist, then this argument is altogether futile. Is this the position, that there is an equal necessity for those realities to exist, and for our souls to exist before we were born? If the former do not exist, neither do the latter?[26]

Coming to the arguments of Descartes, critiques had always been there for a substantialist notion of self and the two famous modern critics of substance theorists are Hume and Kant.

[26] Plato, *Phaedo,* 76d-e.

Both Hume and Kant have criticised the indivisibility argument of Descartes for the separate existence of a mind. The argument presumes the unity of mind and this finds a critique in Hume who questions the nature of this unity of consciousness. Hume thinks that the diverse experiences that we have calls for not unity of consciousness but diversity. In introspection one does not find a single subject in which various ideas and impressions inhere. There is not a single idea that can be perceived within but a bundle of perceptions. Hume argued that the 'soul' could neither be perceived nor could be 'caught hold of' and therefore there was nothing such. We will look at the Humean position in detail in section 1.4.1.2.

Kant similarly argued against the substantial thinkers that the self, which is always the knowing *subject,* cannot be made an *object* of knowledge. Though the unity of ego is posited in Kant as a prerequisite for experiences to be possible, he cautions that this should not lead to assuming the existence of a unitary substance inside. The perception of unity should not be assumed from the unity of apperception. Kant also argued against the indestructibility of the mind. The faculties of the mind admit certain kind of degree and can perish as its prowess weakens. Kant also criticizes this argument for the impossibility of individuation. One mind would be indistinguishable from another if they are neither physical nor identical to their subsidiary properties. And if they also lack the spatial distinction (as in case of separated/liberated minds) they lack any potency to be individually identified. He also posits that even if the mind was free from the body as claimed in Descartes or Plato, it does not prove their immortality, separate from the body.

Usually criticism against any dualistic understanding of human nature begins by invoking Occam's razor - when the events and properties can be tested in terms of one body, why would we assume the existence of more than what is required? Dualistic understandings have traditionally been challenged to explain the incongruence of the two substances, their inter-relation, and the relevance of a spiritual soul in otherwise a mechanical scheme etc. and has not succeeded in responding satisfactorily. Critique of substantialist theories has been all the more vehement in contemporary discourses with many thinkers like Wittgenstein, Derek Parfit and Daniel Dennett offering their allegiance to alternative explanations of the problem of self. It is generally considered today that the dualistic understanding of mind is unscientific. There have been both philosophical and scientific arguments placed against the dualistic theories of mind. Many of the current arguments against a dualistic understanding of human nature come from the sciences. With more knowledge coming in about the

functioning of the human body, it becomes harder to believe there is something that is independently separable from the body, responsible for its humanness. To understand man still in dualistic terms, one needs to dare violate many of the established scientific principles. We will look at some of the traditional philosophical and scientific arguments placed against the dualistic understandings of human nature below.

a) The claims of dualism go against what we get to know from findings in developmental psychology. Human origin is purely physical in single cell organisms and at no point in time there is an infusion of a spiritual substance, or we have no reason to believe there is. And it takes much religiosity to assume that the primordial atom or the single cells that set the motion on, have some kind of mind function imbued into it. The assumption of a non-physical mind seems odd since there is nothing non-material involved in the formulation of the initial stages of the human embryo. Man begins life physically and ends it similarly and it is difficult to believe there is some kind of spiritual substance infused into it for making human life special and sublime.

b) Dualism seems to go against the principles of physics as well. It is unintelligible for the nonphysical mind to have effects on the physical brain. In cases of interaction between the mind and the body, there seems to be energy brought in from different realms, which would defy the well founded law of the conservation of energy. If the mental were to induce action in the physical, then mental energy has to enter the realm of the physical and get converted into physical energy, thus disturbing the equilibrium of energy in there. There could be no physical event inside the brain that causes a group of neurons to fire if the decision in the brain to move the body was purely mental. That would require some energy to be produced, which is an impossible thing to happen in a universe governed by established physical laws. If ever this happens, it would have been made evident by the perceived energy increase within a system of physical operation.

c) A concern generally levelled against dualistic understanding of the human nature is about the interaction between a substantial self and its body. It is a tricky ground to explain how physical memories are formed of the conscious states, if consciousness was independent of and separate from the physical entity. Dualism fails to explain how the physical is influenced by consciousness; how something like consciousness

that has no physical *properties* can have physical *effects*. Also, if the mind could move the body, it would be like claiming that imaginary engines could move physical vehicles – it can be considered telekinesis in every such act. Also, if the immaterial minds can impose action on physical bodies why doesn't a soul act upon any other body than the particular body that it occupies? Interactionism also needs to explain *where* the interaction takes place, as in, while listening to music where in fact is the music heard - in the ear or in the brain. And more importantly, *how* the interaction takes place between the two distinct substances.

d) There are arguments from the cognitive sciences as well. There is strong evidence to argue that neural events co-exist with mental events. Pain being a mental state can be tracked down to the firing of certain type of neurons, for example. More evidently, damage to any part of the human brain can have serious implications to the mental life of the person and the dualists need to explain why and how it is possible. With advanced knowledge in the brain sciences, it could also be predicted as to which mental functions will be affected by a particular brain anomaly. The mind does not seem to be a function apart from the functioning of the neural mechanisms that underlie it and studies done on brains in controlled conditions claim that the relation between the brain and mental functions is more causal than correlational.

We will be focusing our attention more on this aspect throughout the work. It has been argued traditionally that the perishable physical body cannot account for something immaterial and continuous like consciousness, and therefore, the experience of unity and continuity in human nature necessitates the existence of something imperishable and unchanging; the underlying reason had to be as unique as the experience. Reason infers that the subject has to be indivisible, and therefore, immaterial in order to account for unity and continuity of consciousness. It was in this line that philosophers like Plotinus tried answering human nature almost six centuries after Plato drew out a dualistic picture of the world: "...that the unity of experience would be impossible if the soul were matter, because matter is inherently divisible in a way that it would destroy its own and also the mind's unity".[27] The argument says that unity of experience was not possible with divisible matter forming the experiencing or knowing subject and that the self/soul, therefore, had to be simple and immaterial. Now let us turn this argument around.

[27] Barressi and Martin, "History as Prologue – Western Theories of the Self", p. 34.

Since the physical body is extended and perishable we have assumed the existence of a simple and unitary being as the reason for the unity of consciousness and it would imply that in the presence of this indivisible and immaterial substance, which being the reason for self-lumination, there should be no fragmented or non-conscious experiences even in a physically imperfect body. In similar spirits, we can argue that if there are fragmented experiences, or lack of unity and continuity of consciousness, then the underlying mechanism responsible must be perishable and damageable too - it would imply that the knower is neither immaterial nor indivisible. And the diaries of the scientists dealing in unfortunate human conditions brim with pathological cases where they could in all proximity vouch for physical body accounting for such conditions of fragmented experiences, loss of both reflective consciousness and self-concept.[28]

A possible reply that the soul could possibly illuminate only a properly functioning body does not hold water either. For if we look at the Cartesian thought, the soul/mind is self sufficient in knowing itself as the thinking substance, setting aside anything that is identified as physical, "...and the immaterial self's thoughts are its own mental acts, which remain in that substance and are not coded in the brain at all".[29] Anything that the mind can be sure of is itself; it is self conscious. Hence, we fail to understand how a person does not become conscious for reasons associated with the body even when there is a perfect and self-luminous mind substance/soul within it; even in a damaged body, I, as a thinking substance, should be a conscious being. If a person fails to have unity and continuity of experience due to physical impairments, it should, in all logical necessity, show that it is on the body that unity and continuity of consciousness is based upon and not on any external substance. If life and thought are accounted for by an immaterial self, it cannot leave the body alive and non-conscious at the same time; then it should either be both or neither.

We could look at the substantialist account of self from another perspective too. Belief in an eternally existing substantial self/soul must have come as an answer to man's sufferings in the world and his longing for physical survival as well. If the belief in such an entity refuses to give way to scientific knowledge and defies established physical laws, then it would be more of a "need" than "reality". More than probing and discussing the possibility of such

[28] For example, in Korsakoff's syndrome, the patient is unable to remember for more than a second or two. This results in his living in an eternal present and being unable to generate a stable sense of self, having to literally make up himself and his world every moment that he is awake. (Hood, *The Self Illusion*, Pp. 168-9.)

[29] Barressi and Martin, "*History as Prologue – Western Theories of the Self*", P. 39.

theories, the arguments end up proving human need for having such an entity. An immaterial substance was brought in, in all probability, to prove that man was unlike his animal brethren whom he had mastered in the true Christian tradition and that he had chances of immortality, another project that had tempted man from time immemorial. The answer was clearly suggested before the questioning enterprise even began – man had to remain eternal and the 'crown of creation'.

The church thinkers perhaps presented the concept of physical survival after death more vigorously also for the reason that man had failed to find answers to the questions of the world such as suffering here in the world itself. Hope is one of the cardinal virtues of the Roman Catholic Church and the hope is in a suffering-less, happy after life too. For that, physical survival was must, in one's own physical form, and of course, in a better and reengineered fashion. Not only in the Roman Catholic Church, but across religions, the materialist position is no way acceptable; concepts of morality, salvation all demand an essentially persisting self across time; thoughts of personal identity and personal resurrection stretch human imagination more than those of an eternal universe or oneness with the reality.[30] The question is not often "if there is a soul or a persisting substance in man", rather, it is "do we need a soul?" and therefore, philosophically untenable.

1.4.1.2. No-self Theories:

If the thought stream beginning with Plato, running mainly through the thoughts of Plotinus, and Church Fathers to Descartes argues that there is a substantial being that is different from the material body, there is another thought stream, seeded in the minds of the atomists, sprouted in natural science and bloomed in the minds of naturalist thinkers that claimed there was nothing other than the body and its functions. The no-self theorists take the other extreme view of rejecting outrightly the concept of a persisting substantial self. David Hume and Derek Parfit are the major philosophers in the West to hold such no-self views.

[30] For example, the *visistadvaitins* in the Indian tradition do not buy the *Advaita* concept of oneness with the Reality (that there are no separate individual selves). They argue that if *I* were to be identical with the *Brahman* (Reality) and if on *brahmaprapti* (realisation) there was nothing to be other than the *Brahman*, then the entire pursuit for liberation would be a wastage as *I* will no longer be there as the subject to enjoy the supreme bliss of being with the *Brahman*; being the *Brahman*, would be fine, but not that pleasurable. "The liberated soul does not become *identical* with Brahman, but only *similar* to Brahman (Brahmaprakara). It realizes itself as the body of Brahman and ever dwells in direct communion with God, enjoying like God, infinite consciousness and infinite bliss. But it retains its individuality for otherwise enjoyment of bliss in communion with God is not possible." (Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Pp. 353-54).

Long before Plato and other substantialist thinkers, the atomists had claimed that the soul was material like any other object in the world and therefore perishable. If the soul was not material but spiritual, it cannot be a principle of energy but a vacuum, for only vacuum can be incorporeal. And moreover, to enjoy or to suffer anything of the world it should be of this world, they argued. Soul wasn't any other substance and thought was a physical process.[31] Among all the parts of the body, soul is the noblest part, being diffused through the whole remainder of the organism.[32] It is composed of extremely fine, minute, round, and, therefore, nimble, atoms of fire, air, breath, and a still more refined and mobile matter, which is the very soul of soul.[33]

Ideas about the existence of an immaterial soul and personal survival of the bodily death were denounced by Lucretius in his epicurean poem, *De Rerum Natura.* He claimed that we are brought into existence by the wedlock of body and spirit conjoined and coalesced. The soul, constituted of finer and speedy atoms, and having its seat in the heart of man rules his will and desires. Man and his soul are formed of the combination of atoms and at death they disintegrate. Death is the physical coming apart of the complex of atoms that is one's self, resulting in the cessation of any subject that can experience pleasure or pain.[34] When the body is dissolved, the soul is dissolved into its elements and loses all its powers too. The soul is born and grows with the body, and at death disintegrates like smoke.[35,36] They argued that an eternally persisting self was brought in for man's desire to be immortal.

The materialist approach has been an interesting line of thought in the philosophy of self and in the twentieth century thinkers have undoubtedly marched into the materialist camp looking for an answer to the enigma of personal identity and self. The questions that perturb intellectuals today such as 'how we are unified mentally' and 'how any mental unity that we have can be explained' probably have their answers seeding in the thoughts of the atomist minds.

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[31] "Lucretius", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
[32] "Lucretius", *Encyclopædia Britannica Online.*
[33] "Lucretius", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
[34] Barressi and Martin, "History as Prologue – Western Theories of the Self", p. 36.
[35] "Lucretius", *Encyclopædia Britannica Online.*
[36] In the eastern thought this has been more ancient and substantial. A systematic analysis of human nature/reality could be seen in whatever sources are left of the *carvaka* school of Indian thought. Consciousness is not the property or quality of any unperceived substance, rather it must be the quality of the material body constituted of material elements as it exists in the living material body and its immortality cannot be argued for. To prove this point they often quote from the Upanishads: "... thus verily, O Maitreyi, does this great Being, endless, unlimited, consisting of nothing but knowledge, rise from out of these elements and vanish again in them". (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, p. 251.)

It was with the advent of Hume's philosophy that the notion of substantial self took to a new low in Western Philosophy. In *A treatise of human nature*, David Hume argued that the idea of a substantial and persisting self was all but an illusion. Hume, being an empiricist, criticised the concept of a substantial self on two the grounds: that we cannot have any clear and distinct impression of it; and the impressions and ideas do not require another thing to inhere in as each of them can be thought about independently. Hume emphasises that "there must be some one impression that gives rise to every real idea"[37] and when it comes to the idea of self, no one such "real simple idea" is possible. Self is not one such idea but "that to which our several impressions or ideas are supposed to have a reference."[38]

> If any impression gives rise to the idea of a self, that impression must continue invariably the same through the whole course of our lives, since the self is supposed to exist in that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other and never all exist at the same time. It cannot therefore be from any of these impressions or from any other that the idea of the self is derived, and, consequently there is no such idea.[39]

Looking within, all that we perceive are certain impressions and perceptions and they prove the existence of no such entity as a persisting self.[40] It is impossible to have an impression of a persistent self because these impressions on analysis quickly reveal themselves to be, by their very nature, fleeting and observer dependent.[41] And it can be concluded that the "... fact that introspection reveals no inner impression of a self not only provides a reason to doubt the existence of a self, it also shows that even the claim that we can think of a self must be illusory."[42]

Another reason that he proposes against the existence of a substantial self is that since ideas and impressions are each "different, and distinguishable, and separable from each other, and

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[37] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* p. 164.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Buddhism is an Indian school that has similar ideas. "Buddhist philosophical practice contributes to this by attempting to prove that there is no entity that might serve as the referent of 'I', and to explain how the belief that there is such an entity might have arisen. ... Like Hume, Buddhist philosophers typically point to the fleeting nature of all we find when we carefully observe the inner states of the person." (Siderits, et. al., (eds.), *Self, No Self?,* Pp. 5-6.) While denying the existence of a persisting identical entity, Buddhism does not deny the continuity of the stream of successive states. Life is a series of successive states, each causally dependent on the preceding one and giving rise to the succeeding one, and the felt continuity of life is a result of this causal relation existing between the successive states of life, they hold.
[41] Hume (1739/1888), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Pp. 187-93.
[42] Knight, "Berkeley's Refutation of Hume on the Self".

may be considered separately, and have no need of anything to support their existence".[43] Since impressions and ideas can be considered independent on their own, it is unnecessary to think that these mental states themselves require something else to inhere in, like a self.[44] A substantial self has traditionally been understood as the owner of mental properties and Hume argues that if the impressions and ideas can be thought of independently of another substance then there is no need for a property holder like the substantial self.

Hume is famous for his alternative proposal– the bundle theory of self. Hume compared human mind to a theatre where none of the perceptions, what he called the actors, which make continuous appearance, are either 'simple' at a time or 'identical' over time. According to him there is not a single site for mental performance or the fact is that we have no clear idea about any such. All that there is, "are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd."[45] When we ardently look into our own inner world, what we perceive are but continuous movement of impressions and ideas, nowhere do we encounter a mind or self wherein these impressions or ideas inhere. "If, however, persons are believed to be more than this – to be separately existing things, distinct from our brains and bodies, and the various kinds of mental states and events – the bundle theorist denies that there are such things."[46] To ourselves we appear to be merely "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement",[47] and it is from the swiftness of this continuous succession that we come to form an idea that there is something called a self. Self in fact is a fiction.

Then, how do we come to conclude that the world exists as a temporally continuous entity and that we are? Listen to what Hume has to say about our knowability of the world and self. "...neither reason nor the senses, working with impressions and ideas, provide anything like compelling proof of the existence of continuing, external objects, or of a continuing, unified self. Indeed, these two faculties cannot account for our belief in objects or selves."[48] If such is the case, then, what proof do we have of the existence of external objects or our own selves? It is our belief in fictions or entities beyond our experience that is to account for our belief in

[43] Hume (2000), *A Treatise of Human Nature,* p. 164.
[44] Knight, "Berkeley's Refutation of Hume on the Self"
[45] Hume (1739/1888), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 253.
[46] Parfit, "Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons", p. 84.
[47] Hume (1739/1888), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 252.
[48] Norton, "An Introduction to Hume's Thought", p. 11.

our own existence as continuing selves. The impressions that we have either of the world or of ourselves, on closer analysis, reveal to be fleeting and observer dependent by their very nature. Hume then explained as to why people are so susceptible to the illusion of self and how certain dynamic mentalist systems in which we represent ourselves to ourselves, as well as to others, actually work. Ultimately what happened to the notion of self in the hands of Hume was complete destruction and it was now to be considered a fiction that people believed to exist.

It was in the hands of Nietzsche that the notion of self had a violent metaphysical death. It seems quite logical a conclusion that there should be a knower if knowledge, or a subject if consciousness was to be possible and soul as the immaterial substance of intellect has been proposed the rightful answer to this need, from the beginning. But Nietzsche attacks the very root of this argument. According to him, the fiction of self was brought in by philosophers who thought it necessary to have something that thinks if there is thinking. Just as we see the lightening and report it as "it flashes" we end up referring to something that in fact is not only there but is also not required. He says that this line of thought is necessitated by the habits of our language, which ads to every deed a doer grammatically, and it is merely our grammatical incapability to understand an action without a subject that compels us to create a self.

The subject, Nietzsche claimed, is but a "... term for our belief in a unity underlying all the different impulses of the highest feeling of reality: we understand this belief as the *effect* of one cause – we believe so firmly in our belief that for its sake we imagine "truth," "reality," "substantiality" in general".[49] But he claimed, there is no such unity, only "the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum: but it is we who first created the "similarity" of these states; our adjusting them and making them similar is the fact, not their similarity, which ought rather to be denied".[50] In fact, there was no unity of consciousness, what we may have in fact is only a semblance of unity, an impression, he argues.

Our thoughts, and for that matter our consciousness, in general, was depended on the myriad of selves and their interaction and struggle. He feels that we have been victimised by language into thinking that a knowing subject exists. He does not see any reason for us to think that there is a director self dominating this experience of multiplicity. Intellectual

[49] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* Pp. 268-9.
[50] Ibid.

culture, he wrote, has made several "tremendous blunders", including an "absurd overestimation of consciousness, the transformation of it into a unity, an entity: "spirit," "soul," something that feels, thinks, wills".[51] It is illogical to think there is some dominating agent who decides the game and controls the whole process. Thus, it was in the hand of Nietzsche that the substantial self had a rightful assault, and it fell. This argument, somehow, is in line with that of Daniel Dennett, who insists that it is the struggle of a multiplicity of subjects the basis of one's thought and consciousness.

Dennett has offered better and intelligible explanation to the problem of consciousness, a different perspective to the Cartesian model. He rejects a central authority, a knowing conscious subject that controls consciousness, and makes an important contribution in getting rid of the mystical understanding of consciousness.[52] According to Dennett, there is nothing like a central authority rendering meaningful whatever happens within oneself and deciding as to what should happen next. It is purely a play of 'might is right' approach when it comes to an event being consciously thought of.

> We are not the captains of our ships; there is no conscious self that is unproblematically in command of the mind's resources. Rather, we are somewhat disunified. Our component modules have to act in opportunistic but amazingly resourceful ways to produce a modicum of behavioral unity, which is then enhanced by an illusion of greater unity.[53]

Consciousness consists of a system of numerous channels, numerous impulses, each having an activity of its own, and each offering, so to speak, its own draft of what is going to happen on stage/in the consciousness. The vast majorities of these drafts are short-lived and will never even get close to being 'staged': that is, becoming conscious. Only the most hard-to-kill drafts will fight for a place in our conscious awareness.[54] Saying thus, the necessity of a central commanding authority as the knowing subject is done away with. Consciousness becomes an autonomous game of representing the world on a stage where none directs the play. Dennett, while reviewing the *Descartes Error*, strongly states that the all-too-wise Cartesian homunculus may thus be relieved of the burden of comprehending the full import of every image, and the task of directing attention where it is needed. The benefit of ignoring the insignificant events and directing attention to the real issues, and thus saving a

[51] Ibid., Pp. 285-6.
[52] Bertelsen, *Free Will, Consciousness and Self,* p. 178.
[53] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity".
[54] Bertelsen, *Free Will, Consciousness and Self,* p. 178.

considerable amount of time to deliberate upon the given situation must have been the very reason as to why consciousness evolved at all.[55] There seems to be no such authority deciding as to what should reach consciousness and what not; it all depends on the strength of the presentation of the world that is formed.

The argument that there should be a pre-existing subject to have any experience of the object sounds untenable with all the available knowledge that we have of the working of the brain. Derek Parfit must be one of the most ardent contemporary thinkers to argue against any substantial account of self and has proposed alternative themes of morality and personal identity. Since there is no satisfactory criterion explaining personal identity, he, being a reductionist, claims that there is nothing in persons other than their components and that "[o]ur existence consists in the existence of a body, and the occurrence of various interrelated mental processes and events. Our identity over time consists in physical and/or psychological continuity"[56]. Using exotic thought experiments and clinical cases on brain splitting and damage, Parfit argues that man is all brain and body and nothing more. It is primarily psychological continuity and connectedness that vouches for the individuals' being the same person at different times. There is nothing more determinate in personal identity than this. All that matters is relation and determinacy arises in identity from the way we talk. Parfit's views on personal identity and self are not only reductive but deflationary: he claims mental continuity and connectedness is what matters in the end, not personal identity.

So much that Parfit claims that if the brain of a person is transplanted into a new person, the first person will survive as "the resulting person has [the original person's] character and apparent memories"[57]. Parfit even claims that survival could also be a matter of degree. This is not a new line of thought; the ancients had employed similar line of reasoning. The understanding of soul as a material substance was pretty strong even before the substantialist accounts took roots and finds strong reverberations and implications even in today's world of scientific enquiry and philosophical reasoning.

Unfortunate neurological conditions prove that self may not be what we believed it to be. They tell us that it may not be a single substance that we address as self as Ramachandran opines,

[55] Dennett, "Review of Damasio, *Descartes' Error*", Pp. 3-4
[56] Parfit, "Experiences, Subjects, and Conceptual Schemes". p. 218.
[57] Parfit, "Personal Identity", p. 200.

> …a variety of neurological conditions show us that the self is not the monolithic entity it believes itself to be. This conclusion flies directly in the face of some of our most deep seated intuitions about ourselves - but data are data. What the neurology tells us is that the self consists of many components, and the notion of one unitary self may well be an illusion.[58]

And the problem of self must have risen from our need to interact with the world; the concept might be a convenient construction for communication. "Self, of course, is not a thing; it is a dynamic process. ... Turning processes into things is a mere artifact of our need to communicate complicated ideas to others, rapidly and effectively." [59]

The position of the no-self theorists, be it that of scientists or of philosophers, is not without its share of difficulties. We are facing the negation of something that we are most certain of otherwise. We need not only negations but answers too. After arguments and counter arguments, what we come to conclude is that what the no-self theorists deny is the concept of a substantial self. They do not reject the notion of personal identity. They go on to explain the origin and nature of persons through alternative arguments like the bundle theory of personal identity or through an emergentist account.

> "I would say that if one is awake and there are contents in one's mind, consciousness is the result of adding a self function to mind that orients the mental contents to one's needs and thus produce subjectivity. The self function is not some know-all homunculus but rather an emergence, within the virtual screening process we call mind, of yet another virtual element: an imagined *protagonist* of our mental events."[60]

By opposing the substance notion of self, they in fact open up for self, the option to be anything other than a distinct and persisting substance. It could be a process, a conscious thought, a unity constructed, or anything for that matter. It is somewhat in these lines that the non-substantialist theorists build their notion of self too.

1.4.1.3. Non- substantialist Theories of Self:

If substantialist and no-self theorists argued for and against the existence of self as an enduring substantial entity, here the question is about its nature. The non-substantialist theorists do not deny the existence of self, but they do not agree with the substantialist account of self either. Non-substantilists take self to be neither property bearer nor a

[58] Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, p. 247.
[59] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, p. 165.
[60] Ibid., p. 166.

substance distinct from consciousness.[61] Kantian understanding of self might be near to this sort of a position. Or if we look at the Indian school of *Advaita Vedanta* (non-dualism)[62], we see the proposition that consciousness alone exists. Consciousness is the self; it is not something that has to be deposited into any other substance.

> … the non-substantialist sees the self as just consciousness itself. Non-substantialists disagree over just how many selves there are, with the Indian school of Advaita Vedanta famously claiming that there is just one (and that this is the only thing there is). But they agree that the self is something that is just of the nature of consciousness, and that we are mistaken in attributing agency, or any other property that might involve variation, to the self. The self is just 'the witness', or perhaps better, 'a witnessing'.[63]

Kant denies that there is a substantial being that thinks or becomes conscious. Making a distinction between the nominal and phenomenal world was central to the philosophical exercise of Kant. It not only served as foundation to his project of placing knowledge and faith in safe positions but also went a long way in providing him with a theoretical framework for investigating the matter of self.

The phenomenal self, in principle, is no different from any other object of the world that exists in time and space, and so is the methodological accounting of them. Since different objects and events in the phenomenal world are studied under different subjects, the task of understanding phenomenal self falls under the purview of psychology. The noumenal self is unknown and the question of personal identity pertains to the phenomenal self alone. Kant disagreed with the claim of John Locke that personal identity could be known empirically if it consisted of the sameness of consciousness. Kant argued that the consciousness of two people could be qualitatively same and if personal identity is to be known at least in part it must consist in some sort of physical continuity, rather than consisting solely in the sameness of consciousness. There can be no experience which is not the experience of a subject, Kant argues. "When we are conscious of ourselves as subject, we are conscious of ourselves as the

[61] Siderits, et al., (eds.), *Self, No Self?*, p.4.
[62] The advaitins argue that the real is the *Brahma*, the being that is pure consciousness and that there is nothing else. "… Brahman appears as a *jiva* on account of *maya.* The jivahood of the infinite Atman is due to the upadhi of the vijnamayakosa; it is apparent and not real. The characteristics of birth and death, disease and decay, happiness and unhappiness, ascribed to the jiva, are unreal, from the standpoint of Brahman. The individual soul, after the attainment of Knowledge, realizes that it is the same as Brahman."[62] (Sankaracharya, *Atmabodha,* Pp. 74-75.) The ego, which thinks that it is different from everything that is not itself, is not the real self, but only an apparent limitation.
[63] Siderits, et al., (eds.), *Self, No Self?*, p. 4-5.

"single common subject" *[CPR*, A350] of a number of representations."[64] This seems to be more or less a Cartesian way of proving the existence of a thinker. Claiming that there cannot be a thought without a thinker, Descartes had attempted to prove the existence of a substantial self. Here Kant, however, has a different tone. By a 'thinker' he does not mean a substantial entity existing independently of the experiencing physical body. For Kant, the thinker is something connected more intimately with the experience itself. He tried to explain what this *something* is by stating that "in the synthetic original unity of apperception, I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am. This representation is a thought, not an intuition".[65] Hence, the thought that "I think" accompany every experience that is a conscious thought. This thought is the very logical subject of experience.

By integrating the naturalising impulse of the nineteenth century into psychology, William James had proposed a scientific philosophy of self. His approach took to a "study of the mind from within" and hence his account of self is primary. He describes the properties of consciousness from a first person perspective. The personal consciousness is so private that we have no access to the other person's personal consciousness and that we can experience only those contents that occur within the "personal consciousness" that each of us is or has. It is just that your thoughts belong to your other thoughts just as my thoughts belong to my other thoughts.

James tried to integrate the past thoughts and the present feelings of the individual and to explain the secrets of the self in the process. There is a flow of thoughts and experiences within the individual or a passing on of mental states, and he argued that this "the real, present onlooking, remembering, 'judging thought' or identifying 'section' of the stream",[66] is the agent that unifies past and present selves. The self is formed out of this unification process. There was no need to take reference to any "more simple or substantial agent than the present Thought or 'section' of the stream"[67]. It was superfluous to think of an immaterial self as it explains nothing in fact. Identifying a kind of same feeling of warmth between the present feeling and the past thought, it is the *thought* that unifies them through a process of ownership that he calls appropriation. The core of personhood, according to James, is "the

[64] Brook, "Kant's View of the Mind and Consciousness of Self", *SEP*.
[65] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 168.
[66] James, *Principles of Psychology*, i. p. 338
[67] Ibid.

incessant presence of two elements, an objective person, known by a passing subjective Thought and recognised as continuing in time".[68]

For the empirical person, James uses the word 'me' and 'the judging thought' for the 'I'. The 'I' cannot find anything constant as the 'me' self is a changing one, and hence the identity found in its 'me' is a loosely construed one. The identity that 'I' finds is 'on the whole' just like an outside observer might find in the same assemblage of facts. But while the "me" is "an empirical aggregate of things objectively known", the "I" which "knows them cannot itself be an aggregate"[69]. Rather, "it is a Thought, at each moment different from that of the last moment, but appropriate of the latter, together with all that the latter called its own".[70]

In other words, what one calls "the I" is constantly changing and the I as a persisting thing is relegated to fiction. In James's view, one doesn't have to settle metaphysical or ontological questions in order to give a scientific account of the self. Getting clear about the empirical relations between one's experience, one's brain, and one's social relations is enough.[71] This is a view shared by many contemporary thinkers as well. They argue that explaining the phenomenal character of consciousness, which the minimal self-model is supposed to capture, does not require the existence of a stable, permanent or unconditioned self. The minimal self theorists who look to identify the self with the phenomenal character of consciousness, should speak instead of transient minimal phenomenal selves. An enduring who is thus neither necessary nor sufficient for a how.[72]

But the challenge here, in the absence of an enduring self, is to explain this *how*. How does thought become conscious of itself and in turn generate the sense of a knowing subject? If one thought comes to be aware of all other thoughts in turn, we are moving closer to the substantialist position. The whole debate of self-consciousness becomes relevant here.

1.4.1.4. Self: Yes or No?

In the beginning of the chapter we saw that the notion of self has three different dimensions, one of them being its very ontological existence. We discussed this problem by taking into consideration thoughts of a few prominent philosophers and schools, roughly categorising the

[68] Ibid., p. 371.
[69] James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, p. 82.
[70] James, *Principles of Psychology* i, p. 401.
[71] Barressi and Martin, "History as Prologue – Western Theories of the Self", p. 49.
[72] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", Pp. 27-28.

debate into three traditions. While philosophers and religious thinkers have always proposed a substantial, immaterial, and eternal being as the secret to human nature, there have also been thinkers who argued against any such understanding. They argued that there was no self, and even if there was *something* that we could call individual selves, it was a refined form of the body and will disintegrate along with it. Philosophy being a dialectical discipline that develops through debate, the notion of a persisting substantial self independent of the body had to face great philosophical turmoil and could not survive the onslaught of critical analysis for long.

In the light of historical arguments against any substantialst notion of self, and the philosophical problems and explanatory gaps that such understandings involve, it is clear that if the question is about the existence of *self* as an *object* or a *thing* of substantial nature existing within each individual, then we could probably answer 'No'. Rejecting any substantialist notion of self as something that exists independent of body, we can move on to metaphysically and epistemologically more subtle notions of embodied selfhood. Of course, that will lead us in to major ethical and religious problems though. But it would be a philosophical blasphemy to prove the existence of something for its usefulness than for reality.

The moment one denies the existence of a substantial self, she becomes aware that the sense of self itself cannot be negated. The experience of being a self-full being cannot be mistaken and equally the significance it holds in the life of one as an organism; all that one can dispute is the way it is understood. Questions about the nature of self would be inescapable until the sense of me behaving as a being with self-notion goes away. As far as rational beings are beings with some sense of being selves, the question on the existence or non-existence of self could be termed a redundant one, agreeing at the same time that we do not know what actually it is or what causes such a sense. The debate on the problem of self could positively be reframed into a debate on its nature. It could be either the body itself or consciousness produced in the body or anything else that we do not understand of the body as of now for that matter. To paraphrase it again, the conclusion is that, being clear about what we are trying to approve of or disprove might dissolve the debate on the existence of self.

Going through this debate, it becomes clear that the real problem is about the nature of self, though the question asked is about its existence; the debate arises mainly due to the ambiguities involved in understanding the notion. When materialists or empirical science or

Buddhist thinkers disapprove of the existence of self, they do not deny every notion of it; they argue against any substantialist or immaterialist notion. No one denies the notion of self completely. If one was to, then he has to walk the extra mile with the Buddhist thinkers and deny the existence of everything in the world, and the material world itself. In such cases, it would be up to the physical sciences to explain the nature of any object in the world, not only of the existence of human selves. Or else, one has to commit to the monistic oneness of man and nature where there is no question of individuation and hence of self. But we go forward assuming there is something in the world than nothing, and there are some beings that experience some sort of a notion of self, and that there is a difference between the beings with some sense of being a self and those without.

After looking briefly at a few more problems involved in the understanding of self, we will return to this topic, trying to understand different concepts that might help us in understanding the notion better. We will look at self differently in order to frame a working definition of self and to make clear what we are referring to while talking about self. Now, we move on to a few other major philosophical problems involved in the understanding of the notion of self.

1.4.2. Self-reflectivity

We discussed the historical debate on the existence of self in detail in the above section. Here we will look at another problem related to the notion of self, self-reflectivity. We will take a brief look at the problem here and see how it is relevant to our study of self. This along with the problem of unity and continuity of consciousness will be dealt with in detail in the following chapters.

Along with being aware of the world that moves about around us, we are also aware of ourselves as worlds in themselves, about features that make us what we are, and about happenings within us. At times, in bouts of introspection, we are also conscious of ourselves as beings going about doing our bit in responding to the world. The sense of being a unified self, the subject of phenomenal experiences, also calls for some kind of self reflection. It involves the recognition of oneself as a subject to whom the world is exposed to through diverse experiences. There is a difference between having different mental states and being aware of them as happening, all at a single time, in a perceptival oneness to a single individual organism.

> Unity of consciousness is in part a matter of one's various beliefs forming, collectively, a unified conception of the world. ... Perfect unity of consciousness, then, would consist of a unified representation of the world accompanied by a unified representation of that representation, the latter including not only information about what the former represents, but also information about the grounds on which the beliefs that make up the former are based, and about what the evidential relations between the parts of that representation are.[73]

Some kind of higher order reflection added to the organism's unified experience suggests to us that there is some self principle. Or is it that self consciousness acquires the quality of being immediate, or unmediated and available for us in every experience. Is self consciousness parallel with perceptual consciousness? Is it "given immediately, non-inferentially, and non-critically as *mine*"?[74] Though there is some distinction between state consciousness and creature consciousness, could the two be simultaneous too - can I be aware of a thought of mine and as myself having this particular thought simultaneously? When I am conscious of my thought that *p* as my thought, then am I conscious both of my thought *p* and of myself?

In *The First-Person Perspective, and Other Essays,* Shoemaker argues that there could be a kind of immediacy about self-consciousness. When one is aware of one's own happiness, it is not logical to mark a distinction between the perceptual consciousness of being aware of one's being happy and the self, that is taken now as the object, though this distinction is quite becoming when a distinction is made between the act of perceptual consciousness of knowing a butterfly out in the world, and the butterfly that is taken as an object. This phenomenological way of thinking self-consciousness to be present in perceptual consciousness can be seen in James as well, when he says, "whatever I may be thinking of, I am always at the same time more or less aware of myself, of my personal existence".[75] This kind of thinking is very much present in the phenomenologist accounts of consciousness. But on the other hand, Rosenthal[76] argues that self consciousness is not essentially perceptual but intellectual as perceptual consciousness and self consciousness do not exhibit same qualitative characters. Purely intellectual thoughts about oneself produce self consciousness.

[73] Shoemaker, "The First Person Perspective, and other essays", Pp.184, 186.
[74] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Consciousness,* p. 124.
[75] James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course,* p. 42.
[76] Rosenthal, "Two Concepts of Consciousness", *IEP*.

Self consciousness comes unique and with peculiarities while being compared with other perceptual consciousness. The nature and uniqueness of self consciousness have always been serious aspects of consciousness studies.

> "Philosophical work on self-consciousness has thus mostly focused on the identification and articulation of these peculiarities. More specifically, it has sought some epistemic and semantic peculiarities of self-consciousness, that is, peculiarities as regards how we know, and more generally how we represent ourselves and our internal lives."[77]

It is believed that there is some infallibility in self consciousness –that it is immune to error through misidentification. Can we count on it to deliver to us our real nature? Does this introspection reveal the nature of oneself? Does looking into oneself in the Humean way deliver us some sense of our internal life? Does self-consciousness and perceptual consciousness exhibit same phenomenal character – are the two always analogous? We will be discussing some of them in detail in chapter three.

We will also be looking at the mechanisms that underlie human consciousness - mechanisms that make matter think about and feel itself. We ask if it is the brain knowing the remaining body or a portion of it knowing the remaining parts or if the mechanism something subtler beyond human understanding. There have been theories trying to explain self consciousness but the difficulty remains as to how a material organism is able to generate immaterial thought and mind functions and be aware of those thoughts in turn. The materialist accounts of finer atoms forming the mind matter couldn't offer comforting satisfaction to thinkers who argued for a finer substance in the nature of thought to make abstract thinking possible. Question of self as the subject and owner of these states and functions is still relevant. In chapter three we will look elaborately into the problem of self consciousness and the neural mechanisms that underlie such phenomenon.

1.4.3. Unity and Continuity of Consciousness

Sitting leisurely on a rainy evening enjoying a cup of coffee and listening to a melodious music should throw a philosopher into a serious problem: how does he experience all these sensations as happening to a single subject? They do not happen as isolated experiences but in them the world is presented to the subject as a unified whole. Moreover, he remembers this

[77] Kriegel, "Self Consciousness", *IEP*.

having happened earlier and can imagine it to be happening to the same person in the future too.

There is something for the subject to be in a particular mental state with all diverse experiences happening at the same time and knowing them as happening to the one single subject of experiences. What accounts for this singular experiential state? How is an intricate unity brought in into this particular experiential perspective where a set of different conscious experiences are involved? This is precisely the problem of the unity of consciousness. "The kinds of phenomenal gap that occur between the experiences of one person and the experiences of another, or between a person's experiences on one day and their experiences the following day, seem not to occur between the simultaneous experiences of a single person."[78] The experiences are subsumed by a single phenomenal perspective on the world. The notion of self has been introduced not only as the subject of these experiences but as the principle that binds them together into a durable narration.

By the problem of the unity of consciousness we mean the question as to how various beliefs and perceptions of a person form a unified conception of the world. "The contents of phenomenal consciousness are unified into one coherent whole, containing a unified "me" in the center of one unified perceptual world, full of coherent objects. How should we describe and explain such experiential unity?"[79] Who, in the absence of a substantial self, is the subject of experience that has the phenomenal experience of being the subject of varied experiences at the same time and how is it made possible?

One reason presented for the existence of a self is the phenomenon of the unity of consciousness. We do not experience the world in isolated and distinct events but as a coordinated and related whole and the reason why we believe ourselves to be a single being is that we experience ourselves to be the single subject of these numerous simultaneous phenomenological experiences of the world. As far as the concept of self is concerned, unity of consciousness is important, for, "... one way to defend the existence of the self is by arguing that our mental life would collapse into unstructured chaos if it were not buttressed by the organising and unifying function of a pure ego."[80] This stands a strong reason as to why there should be a self. We might explore if it is possible to assert the existence of unity,

[78] Bayne, "Self Consciousness and the Unity of Consciousness".
[79] Revonsuo, "Binding and the Phenomenal Unity of Consciousness".
[80] Zahavi, "Unity of Consciousness and the Problem of Self", p. 317.

invariability and unbrokenness of consciousness all the while denying the existence of an autonomous and enduring being that is quite distinct from the free-floating memories, experiences, ideas and dreams. If yes, what mechanisms or factors do make such phenomenon possible in said scenarios, we might ask.

Following in similar lines we could also understand the problem of the continuity of consciousness. If unity of consciousness questions the phenomena that makes possible a single perceptual space into which myriad of perceptual objects, that in some way are simultaneously present to the individual, are brought in, the problem of the continuity of consciousness questions the sense of being the same subject of experience even when there is nothing that can satisfactorily account for such a sense of being-ness across time. Self also tries fitting in as an answer to the unity of experiences across different time locations. Other than,

> … serving as the subject of conscious states, a self should also explain various diachronic unities. These unities might include that of a person across different stages in a life (or even across lives), and that involved in agency for projects that unfold over time. But the central unity involved in these discussions is the unity involved in the ability of an experience to place the current content of consciousness alongside past and potential future contents in a single stream.[81]

While looking at the problem of unity and continuity of self, we will try to figure out how a person manages to sense herself being the same person yesterday and today. We will look at this problem in detail in the light of the narrativist accounts of self in the final chapter and also will be looking at the neurological mechanisms that make these unities possible in the third chapter. Before concluding the chapter, we, having looked at the major dimensions and problems of the notion of self, will summarise the findings and try to frame a working understanding of it.

1.5. Towards a Definition of Self

After taking a brief survey of the historical debates on the notion of self, it should be clear as to why we cannot proceed further on the topic without having a clear understanding of the concept.

[81] Siderits, et.al., (eds.), *Self, No Self?*, p. 5.

If one assumes self to be an object or a thing of substantial nature, the answer to the question on its existence should probably be "No". But, having the experience of being a unique self and a subject of multiple experiences, we can reframe the question into "are there beings with sense of being self?". But the moment such a question is framed, its redundancy becomes evident, for, any person using the personal pronoun "I" meaningfully, is one such. In unfortunate cases of pathology, there could be human organisms having no sense of self as in the case of Korsakoff's syndrome or Dysexecutive Syndrome [82] and do not qualify to be addressed as persons in the strict sense. We also note that there are also persons who can have sense of being different persons, as in the case of MPD, but each being amnesic to the other at a given time.[83] All these go on to show that, in normal cases, the existence of an experiencing subject and its *sense* of being an independently unique being are non-contestable. And we appreciate that debates about the nature of its permanence and non-bodily existence go on.

When substantialist theorists affirm the existence of self, it means something, and when the no-self theorists deny self, they deny what the substatialists argue for and not what the phenomenologists vouch for. When the social theorists speak of the self they do not argue for a substantilst notion of self. Hume, atomists, *charvakins* or Buddhists for that matter, while claiming that there is no extra bodily enduring self do not deny the sense of being selves. There are contemporary thinkers like Albahari who argue that the self is illusory but assert all the while the existence of self functions like unbrokenness, unity and invariability of consciousness[84] and the Buddhist thinkers who deny ultimate existence of an enduring self but not the reality of subjectivity and the sense of self.[85] The perplexity assumes larger proportions in the contemporary talks with various disciplines and sciences attempting elaborate understandings of the notion of self.

[82] In Korsakoff's syndrome the patient is unable to remember for more than a second or two. This results in his living in an eternal present and being unable to generate a stable sense of self, having to literally make up himself and his world every moment that he is awake. (Hood, *The Self Illusion*, Pp.168-9) In Dysexecutive Syndrome, the person literally misses the thread to make a coherent narration of his/her and the meaningful extension of the self gets impaired.

[83] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain,* p. 224; Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind,* p. 123.

[84] Albahari, *Analytical Buddhism,* p. 3.

[85] "The sense of self at the core of phenomenal consciousness (*svasamvedana*) is indeed very real. This quality, for Dharmakirti, is subjectivity: it is what makes consciousness the unique phenomenon that it is. And each act of cognition thus has this aspect of subjectivity." (Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 33.)

Self is such a concept that it becomes elusive the more we try grasping it. There are a large number of objects/processes/concepts that the pronoun *I* makes reference to, not only because the concept has been understood differently but also it has different facets to it. In the course of this work, we will be exploring in detail various concepts like minimal self, proto self, essential self, social self, narrative self etc. Since there is a difference between beings with a sense of self and those without, and for all practical purposes we cannot proceed further without according our allegiance to some sort of self-concept, we try to understand what we are talking about and define it, taking for granted the existence of something that we refer to by 'self', whatever principle or function it might be.

Self is mostly a thin notion, with philosophers often differentiating it from more robust concept like 'person'. This distinction is clear in Locke who made a demarcation between the two. According to him, self is:

> ...that conscious thinking thing, whatever substance made up of (whether spiritual or material, simple or compounded, it matters not), which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends.[86]

Such notions of self, as being capable of experience and co-durable with any conscious episode, have been shared by many thinkers in the contemporary world. This minimal notion of self is more basic, immediate, or primitive "something" that we are willing to call a self, "even if all of the unessential features of self are stripped away"[87] one that Dan Zahavi puts across as the minimal self, "something I can fail to articulate (i.e. give narrative expression to), but something that I cannot fail to be."[88] There could be animals for sure and unfortunate human beings who experience the world as distinct from themselves, and have strong survival instincts, but might be lacking for themselves a history of their being such, and conscious awareness of themselves.

This might become clearer if we look at the levels of self-function explained in Antonio Damasio's works. He begins with a non-conscious physiological notion of proto self that is "an interconnected and temporarily coherent collection of neural patterns which represent the

[86] Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 341.
[87] Gallagher, "Philosophical conceptions of the self", p.15.
[88] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood,* P. 116.

state of the organism, moment by moment, at multiple levels of the brain"[89] and moves on to the intermediary concept of core self, which is "the transient protagonist of consciousness, generated for any object that provokes the core-consciousness mechanism".[90] This core state is generated endlessly due to the permanent availability of provoking objects in the world and thus appears continuous in time.[91] These notions are followed by autobiographical self, a concept that, unlike the core self, which inheres as a protagonist of the primordial account, and unlike the proto-self, which is current representation of the state of the organism, is in the true cognitive and neurobiological sense of the term.[92] It is the notion that a being with conscious history has, in Damasio's words, these are "autobiographies made conscious".[93] We will be dealing with all these notions in detail in the following chapters.

The thin notion of self was discarded for more robust and broader concepts of self in the process of naturalisation. Even the Cartesian concept of self, in all probability, lacked historicity. All that Descartes was aware of was that "I exist" and that too, for the present moment to entertain the same thought. He was probably aware of just the "thinking thought, the self" not the person that Descartes was. The notion of humanness includes full bloomed notions of conscious historicity as well and was redefined as personal identity. "Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is *the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*."[94] More than the minimal selves, this notion of person gets broader and richer with more social scientists and psychologists getting into the arena to understand self. Self has come to be looked at as a larger concept having historicity and is located in a society.

> ... [S]elves are not isolated nuclei of consciousness locked in the head, but are 'distributed' interpersonally. Nor do selves arise rootlessly in response only to the present; they take meaning as well from the historical circumstances that gave shape to the culture of which they are an expression. The program of a cultural psychology is not to deny biology or economics, but to show how human minds and lives are reflections of culture and history as well as of biology and physical resources. ... There is no one 'explanation' of man, biological or otherwise. In the end, even the strongest causal explanations of the human condition cannot

[89] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens,* p. 174.
[90] Ibid., p.175.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., p.173.
[93] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind,* p. 210.
[94] Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity,* p. 53.

> make plausible sense without being interpreted in the light of the symbolic world that constitutes human culture.[95]

Since any social concept of self has to be understood in such a way, defining the notion of person also becomes equally important. Now look at what Locke has to say about a person. For him, a person is: "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it."[96]

When it comes to the question of persons, it is made clear that persons are self-conscious and exist as numerically and temporally identical entities. When individuals talk about themselves, it is this notion that gives them some kind of assurance that they exist and there is something that is common to their past and present. Also in a short time, they might be able to give much information regarding this person that they think themselves to be. This must be the aspect of self that is more related to the relational aspect of self. It is in interacting with the external world that the individual comes to identify oneself as a continuous being, existing across time and space. The society recognises him/her as such too.

It is the notion of person, marked with sort of consistency and relative permanency, that gives individuals the sense that they are permanently enduring beings, which might also have chances of even surviving physical death. In a study on self it is better to distinguish between *Self* and *Person* for all practical purposes. Now, once differentiated, we can look for the mechanisms that enhance the selves' journey into persons and we might be able to discover the secret behind our unfailing sense that we are eternal beings. It is the conscious awareness of being distinct individuals that primarily differentiates the two. And we call these beings with a sense of self, "*self-beings*", in order to distinguish them from selves which might be immediate subjects of phenomenological experiences but not having conscious awareness of themselves as selves or a historicity.

1.6. Self-beings

In the discussions above, we saw how lack of conceptual clarity forces unending debates on self and its existence. Being clear about i) given minimal selves of subjective experiences, ii)

[95] Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, p. 138.
[96] Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 335.

the undeniable sense of being selves, and iii) the existence of individual organisms with this sense of selves, might go a long way in making the debate easier. We have seen in the discussions above that we cannot deny the existence of organisms as immediate subjects of experience without denying practically the existence of everything in the world and that the sense of being unique subjects of such experiences that every normal human person has is equally undeniable.

Thus, we argue that there are individuals and mostly all of them (except those in pathological states) have sense of being individual selves. For all practical purposes in our further discussions, we will be using the phrase "self-being" to refer to these individuals who have some sort of a sense of being a self, individuals who are self conscious, conscious of their past and future. Since we will be dealing elaborately with concepts like minimal selves, narrative selves, social selves etc, we name our concept of person for discussions in this work as *Self-Being*, a being that has the sense of being a self, unless it is mentioned otherwise. This will be used for distinguishing persons from those immediate minimal subjects of experience that are capable of relating to the world as unique subjects but do not possess any notion of themselves. We will be looking at the difference between the two throughout this work and trying to figure out what processes and mechanisms make the difference possible.

1.7. Conclusion

It is right for a rational animal to question what differentiates it from other animals or what accounts for its capacity for reflective reasoning and the proposed answer served man different purposes. In soul, man had an answer to the problem of change and continuity, an answer to his mental capacities that differentiated him from non-human animals and a hope to survive physical death. But this notion of a permanent substantial self that is independent of the human body has failed to survive the onslaught of critical analysis. Even the notion of a unified self has failed to cross over to our times. Self today exists as fragmented aspects or hyphenated properties. Those who seek to understand self today in both the philosophical and scientific literatures soon discover that none but the carefully initiated can wade into the waters of theoretical accounts of the self without soon drowning in a sea of symbols, technical distinctions, and empirical results, the end result of which is that the notion of the unified self has faded from view.[97]

[97] Barressi and Martin, "History as Prologue – Western Theories of the Self", p. 52.

We have identified three major problems related to the concept of self in philosophy. One of the major problems, the ontological dimension of self-concept, the existence of self, was looked at in detail in this chapter from a historical perspective. We discussed how philosophers have looked at the existence and nature of self historically. Though history has almost come to deny the notions of a substantial self, the thought arises simultaneously that the sense of self itself cannot be negated, but only that one can dispute the way it is understood. Though the nature of self is still a highly debatable topic, the experience of being a self-full, selfish, or *self-being* cannot be mistaken all the same and equally the significance it holds in the life of me as an organism. In the next chapter, we will be getting into this dimension of self: the experiential dimension - what is it for me to have an experience of me as a self. We will also be looking at the social dimension of self while trying to understand how the social existence enhances the minimal selves' transformation into full blown social selves.

I took a deep breath and listened to the old bray of my heart. I am. I am. I am.

– Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

Chapter Two

Experiential and Relational aspects of Autobiographical Selves

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Experiential and Relational aspects of Autobiographical Selves

2.1. Introduction

In the first chapter we briefly surveyed the philosophical issues related to the nature and existence of self as unfolded in the history of Philosophy. Questions have not been satisfactorily answered and the problem of self has remained one of the biggest enigmas of human world; that he has not known himself, that too, irrespective of all the scientific and technological advances he has made on the external world. With unparalleled advances in the material sciences and more significantly in the brain sciences, the issue of self has taken to rather drastic physicalist turn. Though such speculations were not unheard of from the beginnings of human thought, be it in the thoughts of the atomists in the West or the *Carvakas* or Buddhists in the East, we now have more clarity on what we are actually looking for.

The ontological dimension of self, was briefly looked at in the previous chapter. Though the existence of a substantial and persistent self is still debated upon earnestly and its nature is a hot topic of academic dispute, there is something that refuses to wither away, no matter the amount of intellectual exercises that go into making the self seem insignificant: the experiencing of a self function. Thinkers across schools of thought leave space for self experience, though in different forms and degrees. Unless this sense of an experientially continuing subject manages to wither away, the debate on the nature of self will remain alive. Here, in this chapter, we will look at two other dimensions of the question on self – the experiential self and the relational self. We will begin the chapter with brief discussions of a few major contemporary notions in the understandings of self, moving on to understand the alternate accounts of narrative selves.

2.2. Towards some Contemporary Notions of Self

In contemporary discussions across disciplines self is no longer taken as a univocal concept; it is looked at from multiple perspectives and that helps us in nailing the concept better. In this section we will analyse a few connotations of the self as found in the contemporary literature especially the ones offered by William James and Ulric Neisser. Following that, we will enter into discussions of two particular concepts: minimal self and narrative self, which

have not only found greater significance in self talks today, but also cover many other concepts within their range, in being the minimum and maximum understandings of the notion of self.

2.2.1. Notions of Self: William James

Though in the previous chapter it was from a metaphysical point of view that we looked at the historical development of the self notion, here we will look at the different notions associated with the problem of self in a more analytical way from relational or social dimensions. In the times that followed the Second World War the notion of self became more of a fragmented notion, thanks to the various disciplines that welcomed open heartedly the new found interest in the topic.

William James tried to unify these aspects to present a unified notion of self, identifying and distinguishing many of them in the process, leaving for us a wide array of self-notions. He demarcated between the empirical self and the subjective self. What we call as 'me' was referred by him as the empirical self - it often becom ing the object of our own investigation. There are also some material things that are more related to our self-concept than others, and at times it becomes difficult to categorise them into what we consider "me" and "mine"; similarly, anything that is related to one's emotional life can silently cross over the boundary of "me" and "mine" often and on. For example, the body can be considered both as mine and me, even one's family or material property in a wider sense can be considered as part of one's self. William James divided the "me" self into three categories: The Material Self, The Social Self, and The Spiritual Self[1] and for him the "I" self was the thinking self, which he linked to the soul of a person or what we now think of as the mind[2] and termed it as the pure ego.

2.2.1.1. Material Self

James identified the material aspect of self as the one consisting of things that belong to us or that we belong to. Things like our body, family, clothes, and wealth are some that make up our material selves.[3] For James, the core of the material self was the body,[4] which we love to adorn and treat with utter care. It is never "my body is hurt" but "I am hurt". This is followed by one's family, which is considered to be part of oneself as its members' glory and shame

[1] Cooper, "William James's Theory of the Self".
[2] James, *Principles of Psychology*, p.135.
[3] Ibid., p. 114.
[4] Ibid., p. 74.

become one's own. The material property, in defining us to a certain point also determines who we are; our attitudes and others' attitudes towards us often being determined by the possessions we hold. James, for example, argues that if at one point we had a lot of money and then lost it, who we are as a person would change as well.

2.2.1.2. Social Self

An intelligent person behaves becomingly in given social situations or according to the significance that he merits in a particular social setup. Individual personalities are but individuals' reactions to the societal contexts and James believed that people had as many social selves as there were distinct groups of persons whose opinions they cared for or the number of social situations they participated in.[5] There could be as many social selves in a person as the number of socially interacting groups that he/she has to be in. Being social beings in need of being noticed favourably by those around, wounding a person's image in the mind of another would be bruising himself/herself. Our social self is the recognition that we receive in our tribes and to recognise oneself as unworthy of attention in a social group would be the most torturous thing that can happen to an individual. The fame or honour that a man enjoys or misses in his groups of acquaintances is what is usually called his social self.

2.2.1.3. Spiritual Self

The aspects involved in the social self or the material self can be disowned by an individual and still be what s/he thinks s/he is. When James speaks about the spiritual self, it sounds to be what we usually consider by the word, self. After a strenuous stint of introspection in the Cartesian manner, James comes to ask what is at the core of all his selves that he can mostly disown and still be him. It is the self of all the other selves, the core of one's self. Faced with the question as to what it is, James thinks everyone might probably answer it in somewhat similar ways.

> They would call it the *active* element in all consciousness; saying that whatever qualities a man's feelings may possess, or whatever content his thought may include, there is a spiritual something in him which seems to *go out* to meet these qualities and contents, whilst they seem to *come in* to be received by it.[6]

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., p. 297.

This most subjective and intimate self includes an individual's intellectual, moral and religious aspirations, core values that do not fluctuate quite easily in the course of one's life. This aspect is contributed by the most essential and intimate aspects that one might narrate if one were to describe oneself.

2.2.1.4. Pure Ego

When it comes to the question of personal identity, William James brings in the idea of pure ego. The question about the nature of the self is: if it is a purely spiritual self in the religious terminology or if it is a bundle of mental states in the Humean way. William James takes somewhat the second way and finds self to be nothing but a stream of conscious thoughts, the pure principle of personal identity. It is the stream of thoughts that James calls the *I* self. It is different from the *me* selves as it is in the process of finding a continuity principle for the *me* selves that we come to the principle of pure ego, providing some kind of continuity and permanence. The pure ego could be understood by what we call the soul in an analogical sense. The pure ego is not a substance and is beyond any empirical analysis. The past, present and future selves are held in continuity by merit of the formation of a stream of fleeting mental happenings, and the pure ego's perception of consistent individual identity arises from a continual stream of consciousness.[7]

2.2.2. Notions of Self: Ulric Neisser

Ulric Neisser talks about five different aspects of self-knowledge, generated by five kinds of self information. There is some knowledge that we receive directly about the self and other that are given only on reflective thinking. These five aspects that Neisser proposes seem so diverse for the differences in their origin, development, knowability, pathologies affecting them, and their significance, that they seem different selves as such. Neisser, while discussing how these are different from each other, also shows how they are interdependent and come to work as a single individual unit. He, after analysing the concept of self and the aspects involved in it, concludes "Five Kinds of Self Knowledge" by showing how the conceptual self includes more or less all other four selves.

[7] *"Resemblance among the parts of a continuum of feelings* (especially bodily feelings) experienced along with things widely different in all other regards , *thus constitutes the real and verifiable 'personal identity' which we feel."* (Ibid., p. 336.)

2.2.2.1. The Ecological Self

The individual is one bound in some environmental settings at any given time and the ecological aspect of the self is related to the organism's embodied nature. But in Neisser's observation, the ecological self does not necessarily mean the body alone. Since the aspect of self is directly perceivable by the individual, anything that is perceived to be moving along with the body, the better if the movement is caused by the body, is considered to be a part of the self. As in the case of the material self of William James, the dress, the shoes, or the automobile that we are driving in all merit being labelled "I" at times, as in cases where we report "you touched me", when in fact you touched only my coat or "you ran into me" when in fact what your hit was on my car etc. The ecological self is material and directly perceivable by the individual.

2.2.2.2. The Interpersonal Self

The interpersonal self is characterised by species specific emotional rapport and communication. Neisser argues that even this aspect of the self can be directly perceived on the basis of objective information. "The interpersonal self is the self as engaged in immediate unreflective social interaction with another person."[8] Unreflective in the sense, that one does not necessarily need a definite concept of self or of the other to meaningfully interact as in the case of infants. It is the social aspect of self specified by the emotions and behaviours of others towards us and is developed and confirmed by the response of others to our behavioural gestures. Interpersonal self is developed from the social interaction that the individual comes to initiate in and receive from the tribe. There is nothing that is inferential about knowing this aspect of the self as the actions and oneself as the subject and recipient of them is directly known.

2.2.2.3. The Extended Self

This aspect of self is an extension of me from the present to include my memories and anticipations. Whereas the ecological self and the interpersonal self mark only the present aspects of the self, the extended self provides some kind of temporality to beings flowing from a past to the future. But it is not about chronologically remembering events of the past but recognising how *I as a subject* is related to them. Remembering an event from the past as

[8] Neisser, "Five Kinds of Self Knowledge", p. 391.

I did helps me in recognising my existence as one that transcends the present self. The extended self is how I see myself as it was in the past and how I expect myself to be in the future and this is rightly facilitated by the faculty of memory and imagination. Unlike the ecological and interpersonal selves, the extended self is not immediately accessible to the individual mind; it is but on further reflection that I recognise myself to be a persisting being across temporal locations. But the remembered self does not exist independently since much of what we remember and how we remember depend on our concept of ourselves; though self-concept is formed by memories, our memory itself, in turn, is framed by the sense of self working as a theory.

2.2.2.4. The Private Self

The realization that some of my pains and pleasures are not shared and are left to me alone raises in me a sense of privacy of experience. There is something that belongs to me alone, deep secured away from the availability of the world. Some phenomenological experiences like dreams and memories are very much personal and are virtually independent of the interpersonal and ecological selves. We not only have such experiences private to us but also remember and recognise them as our very own and hence augment the extended self. Since it is considered to include aspects of the most personal experience of mine, my thoughts, beliefs, dreams, etc., this self seems to be what I most personally is. We know that "[T]here is an activity that is commonly called 'seeking one's self', and this is not the search for some entity, but for some core set of convictions and other dispositions that gives structure and unity to one's life-plans and projects.**"**[9] If one was to introspect or "seek one's self", all the content that one might find inside in the Humean sense would be the private self. In the history of philosophy, knowledge of this self has been considered as one possible without chances of error; it has been epistemologically shielded and every other experience could be erroneous and delusory.

2.2.2.5. The Conceptual Self

It is a constructed sense of self from the assumptions and experiences that the organism gains from all the other four aspects of the self. The concept of self is influenced in its developmental stages by the culture one is in and the influential individuals in the group. It is from the various aspects of the self as seen above, in right interaction with the society that

[9] Siderits, et.al., (eds.), *Self, No Self?*, P. 6.

proper notion of self starts developing. But this conceptual development is not as much influenced by the culture later on in life as in the initial stages. The initially passive reception of what others think of us becomes selective after a theoretical framework of ourselves has been developed. Then on, what and how one perceives and interprets depend on the framework that one already is. When we say the self notion is to be considered a theory, we are talking about this conceptual self, as it is through this conceptual framework that we receive and interpret the world stimuli - the prism that gets developed in infancy keeps evolving within its own constructed limitations. Our beliefs about what we are most certainly influence the way we perceive the world and perform in it. The conceptual self also works as a meta self in the sense that it involves all other selves in its fold.

In the article 'Five Kinds of Self Knowledge', Neisser broadly analyses the notion of self, as to what we really mean when we say "I am". Though different aspects of the self look distinct, they function in cohesion giving some sense of unity and continuity to the individual, who interacts with the social and natural environment as a whole. The concept formation of self includes the minimal biological self that we have spoken about, the interpersonal self of our social life, the private self of our thoughts and dreams, and the extended self of our memories and plans. The full bloomed self-concept that we have developed seems to subsume all of them into its fold in a coherent and meaningful way. He claims that our concepts of the self,

> ...typically include ideas about our physical bodies, about interpersonal communication, about what kinds of things we have done in the past and are likely to do in the future, and especially about the meaning of our own thoughts and feelings. The result is that each of the other four kinds of self-knowledge is also represented in the conceptual self.[10]

Thus, he makes is out an analysis of factors that constitute our self-concept. They are not distinct entities, but different aspects of the self notion. While explaining the notion of self, Neisser does not see an essential need for bringing in an inner man, an unconscious mind or an alternate personality above these aspects involved. The naturalist perspective on self by its own merit deserves and suffices an explanation. Self-concept is developed by encompassing the various aspects of self that we can relate it with. It is from the perceived and inferred relation existing between all these that we come to form a concept of ourselves and they

[10] Neisser, "Five Kinds of Self Knowledge", Pp. 401-402.

possibly work as the content of that abstract notion - an abstract entity of the real subjects of experience and memory. What we perceive of the body and the world, and the memories and thoughts that we have of them all combine together to form a meaningful concept of the subject who experiences these. This concept in turn, works as a theory that determines what we perceive and how we interpret the world in the future. This interrelation existing between the experiences and the abstract concept of a subject-self in turn is responsible for giving us a sense of self located and persisting in time and space. The "I" might even be a universal name given to any organism capable of threading all of the aspects mentioned above into one meaningful story.

We have briefly looked at different notions or aspects of self as explained by Willaim James and Ulric Neisser. Though there are many more categorisations of the self, we have looked at these two to have a basic understanding about the trend. The two have, though in different languages, spoken about somewhat the similar stuff: the body, its thoughts and experiences, the social interaction and finally about one's self-concept. So, if we were to cover them all in minimum categories, it would be in the categories of the organism and its stories. All the different aspects of the self are nothing but conscious awareness of the organism's interaction with itself and the world. What is required is of us is to clearly understand the concept of self, and be clear about the organism that is capable of experiencing itself and the world, and its narrative capacity, wherein it interprets the world as relevant to itself to become a social, religious, and political self.

These different notions of self are commonsensical today and the question of self demands itself to be looked upon through a prism of multiple perspectives. Pathological disassociation of selves boosts this debate, as in cases where individuals who face difficulties in experiencing or constructing one or the other aspects of self being able to have enhanced experience of the other aspects.

The aforementioned aspects of self-could be considered as the organism and its constructions in response to particular demanding situations of life. Thus, if we were to exhaust self-concept with least number of categories, we should consider the organism that is capable of experiencing the world at the minimum end and the temporal selves at the maximum. The relation between the two extremes of the self is something that puzzles us again. We do not have conclusive reasons to assert any causal relation between the two, but sufficient reasons

to believe that there should be one. In the following section, we will delve deeply into the notions of minimal self and social selves and see how far they are causally related.

2.3. Pre-Reflective Minimal Selves and Narrative Selves: The Causal Link

It is also the human capacity for language, the ability to have loud concepts of himself and to use the first person pronoun, *I,* that probably differentiates man from other non-human animal species. And in conversing, we address persons who are already capable of using that self referential pronoun, and understanding such when being used. This might prompt us into thinking that self-concept or self-function is impossible in a pre-reflective and immediate way without the mediation of a conceptual framework. Here our concern is to see if there could be a more-primitive self, a non-conceptual, minimal form of self, independent of language. If all that unessential aspects 'we thought we were' were stripped off to the threshold of our losing the sense of self, would there still be 'something' very basic and immediate about us that could leave us a chance of our individual being-ness?

It is a generally accepted norm that there cannot be abrupt beginnings to stories. The narrator has to have larger frames and be aware of them - there has to be a beginning - and connections have to be established with the past and the future. So, in the case of humans, where does the process of narration begin? To begin with all that we have are: a history; unrelated and meaningless sense impressions; and the possibility of narration. Before one becomes a narrated story, there is a phase in time when one is a bodily being with just unconnected feelings and impressions within. And a fundamental form of self has been proposed, in order to contain this situation of being a minimal self or pre-narrative self. The organism at this stage is considered to be a momentary self that exists without long-term continuity. It has no a personal history as well. It is a self that every being with a capacity to feel is, something fundamental to every phenomenological being. Processes of interpretation, awareness and linguistic expressions are expected far ahead in the future. In Zahavi's words, "…the minimal self is something I can fail to articulate (i.e. give narrative expression to), but something that I cannot fail to be".[11] The minimal self,

> ... links intimately, not just to the ontology of consciousness, but to the most basic form of self-experience: the experience of being a *subject* of conscious states, a *thinker* of thoughts, a *feeler* of feelings, an *initiator* of actions, etc. in other words, the minimal self captures the

[11] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood,* p.116.

> feeling of phenomenal interiority that is perhaps the central aspect of selfhood – the feeling that I, and only I, have this first-hand mode of access to the going on in my head at this very moment.[12]

This is the kind of self that one reaches from a phenomenological perspective – a momentary self as the subject of current experiences. For being the subject of experiencing sensations in and on the body, one might not need a history and future, but for interpretation of the experience later on. A kind of "bare locus of consciousness, void of personality"[13] is what Strawson calls this particular state of fundamental being. We might understand this to be a momentary subject of isolated experience that does not essentially require reflective consciousness to be a part of it. While defining the notion of minimal self, Shaun Gallagher says, "[t]he minimal self almost certainly depends on brain processes and an ecologically embodied body, but one does not have to know or be aware of this to have an experience that still counts as a self-experience."[14] It is also true that "the phenomenality of a conscious state, the argument goes, is independent of its narrative structure and it discloses a primitive kind of self. Any organism capable of phenomenal consciousness thus has a minimal self."[15] If we are thus willing to extend the scope of the definition of self beyond reflective consciousness to include notions of minimal self as the most primitive and non-conceptual form of self, it might cover even non-human animal species. The minimum required to ensure individuality and distinction might be the ability to experience one's environment as distinct from oneself and to respond to it, and not one's ability to communicate it.

Neonates' imitation studies indicate that a minimal sort of self-experience, the sense of being a unified, embodied perspective on the world, is present from birth[16] and we may affirm the existence of a pre-linguistic non-conceptual self-function in the infants. In less than an hour after birth, the neonates can make imitations of the facial gestures of others presented to them, which has to involve the capacity to imitate.[17] This happens because the infant is capable of distinguishing itself from others, of realising its body and using it without watching it, and, recognising the faces of the same species to which it belongs (non-human faces are not imitated by the infant[18]). One possible interpretation of this finding is that these

[12] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 28.
[13] Strawson, "The Self and the SESMET."
[14] Gallagher, "Philosophical conceptions of self", p.15.
[15] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 44.
[16] Ibid., p. 41.
[17] Meltzoff, and Moore, "Imitation of Facial and Manual Gestures by Human Neonates", Pp. 75–78 .
[18] Legerstee, "The Role of Person and Object in Eliciting early Imitation", Pp. 423-433.

three capacities present in neonates constitute a primitive self-consciousness, and that the human infant is already equipped with a minimal self that is embodied, enactive and ecologically tuned.[19]

Pre-narrative selves may not be temporally located, but they are very much subjects of phenomenological experience. And every normal neonate is a given self with the potency of becoming conscious of its self-functions and expressing them. They behave like self-beings – with their sense of boundary, control and immune system and instincts. According to Bruce Hood, a developmental psychologist, we are born with a unique predisposition to the world; with a sense of bodily boundaries and internal disposition to learn, imitate and control. We are beings that come with first person perspectives, and conditioned to be receptive and responding in unique ways. It seems the human child is a proto-self with the capacity to register experience as unrelated episodes, and the sense of individuality must be emerging steadily from these experiences.

The existence of pre-narrative self is also evident in cases of people with drastic form of memory loss, and who are hence incapable of forming narrative selves.[20] These persons can very well experience every moment of their phenomenological existence as subjects but fail to experience themselves as persons existing temporally in the past and future. Though temporal continuity is an essential aspect in the debate of self and most prominently raises the question of a substantial self, the concept of minimal self comes to mark what is most immediately accessible to consciousness. Minimal self is explained as "Phenomenologically, that is, in terms of how one experiences it, a consciousness of oneself as an immediate subject of experience, unextended in time."[21] Minimal self is conceived without a reference to the time factor, neither to memories nor to future expectations. It is a 'present-ness'.

But it can logically be questioned if we are ontologically anything more than these pre-reflective selves or will it be the case that there is nothing permanent and continuing in us than the momentary selves of Buddhism? Hume considered the mind to be a bundle or a commonwealth of fleeting impressions and perceptions. "He clearly does not think that the *self* consists in a bundle of perceptions, but it is less certain that he takes resorting to the

[19] Gallagher, "Philosophical conceptions of self", p. 17.
[20] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, Pp. 118-119.
[21] Gallagher, "Philosophical conceptions of self", p. 15.

fiction that there is a self to be necessarily an ill from which we must be cured."[22] If Hume famously returned devoid of a self after a *tour de mind*, the Buddhists too agreed upon the nature of mind in similar tones. Mind is similar to anything else in a world of fleeting nature and there is nothing persisting or substantial in one's mind than the fleeting thoughts or impressions that we get to know while delving in. Buddhism has taken upon itself to prove, as Hume tried doing, how even in the absence of any persisting entity as a referent of the "I", such a belief that there is someone persisting across time, comes about. Where does a sense of permanence come from when nothing in the world, including individuals, can be permanent?

Individuals do have the unmistakable sense of continuity and identity of themselves as beings existing across time and space. Since such a sense is an integral part of the self process, this state of being is more evident in us than the states of minimal selves. Narrative self as "a more or less coherent self (self-image) that is constituted with a past and a future in the various stories that we and others tell about ourselves"[23] would be a better candidate to be taken for analysis in a study on self. The continuity of a person as the same across time amidst constant changes and, that too, in the absence of anything substantial and unchanging within, is an unresolved philosophical problem. Exploring the underlying structure that generates or warrants such a sense of persistence is what amazed thinkers in the West and they have come to consider this as a foolproof method to reveal the secrets of self-knowledge. But when the nature of this unified and relatively enduring person is put to the test of analysis, all that we end up witnessing are but momentary impressions and a stream of them made possible through memory[24] or rapidity[25].

It is a position that Buddhism had been struggling with. Now the onus would be on the Buddhists to explain how these subjective experiences are possible in the absence of anything greater existing permanently than the minimal subjective experiences. May be, it is for reasons of embodiment and subjectivity. It seems to be a difficult position even for Buddhism

[22] Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of Soul*, Pp.160-61.
[23] Gallagher, "Philosophical conceptions of self", p.15.
[24] Locke probably meant memory while calling it extendable consciousness in saying: "... in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done." (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Ch. 27.9)
[25] ".. that there are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. (Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I, IV, vi.)

to reject the existence of a given bodily self, the reason why idealism has lost its allure. Every being capable of consciousness has to have or be a minimal subject of experience, a phenomenal self. The embodied nature is something that cannot be denied even though its permanence can be. At the least subjects of singular experiences we got to be, no matter to what extent we go to, to deny any talk of a self existing.

We have also seen that not only in questions of consciousness of a higher order but even at a very rudimentary level we are faced with the undeniable question of subjective experience, the most basic form of self-experience. Even while disagreeing on the nature of the "I", it cannot be negated sensibly that I feel, think, and act as an individually existing entity. I get to capture the first person feeling that it is *I* and no one else who is undergoing such phenomenal experience at this moment. "The idea is to link an experiential sense of self to the particular first-personal givenness that characterizes our experiential life; it is this first-personal givenness that constitutes the *mineness* or *ipseity* of experience"[26] We cannot fail to admit this sense of the existence of a very minimal subject of phenomenal experience of feelings and thoughts. Thus, unlike the speculations on the notion of substantial self, philosophical discussions of the minimal self offer a subtle brand of realism about the notion of self. Due to its place within a defensible characterization of phenomenal consciousness, the phenomenological notion of the minimal self offers a unique challenge to the Buddhist deflationary project of denying the ultimate reality of the self.[27]

But we may see that Buddhism may not find difficulty in appreciating - all the while being clear about what they deny and what they affirm - the existence of minimal selves as subjects of phenomenal experience even in the absence of persisting and substantial selves. Within the Buddhist tradition even while denying the existence of an ultimately enduring self (*ahamkara*) certain thinkers in Buddhism leave room for the reality of subjective experience (*svasamvedana*).[28] They offer such a model of consciousness that asserts the phenomenal character of consciousness and disapprove its invariable dependency upon the existence of a fixed, enduring, or unconditioned subject.[29]

> ...[s]ome Buddhist thinkers argue that the denial of the self does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with a denial of subjectivity. These thinkers offer a model of consciousness that

[26] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood,* p. 125.
[27] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 29.
[28] Ibid., p. 33.
[29] Ibid., p. 30.

> preserves its phenomenal character while nevertheless denying that the phenomenal character of consciousness is dependent upon the existence of a fixed, enduring, or unconditioned subject.[30]

Since Buddhism is well into debates on the nature of self and subjectivity, we might assume that they are in a better position to clear philosophically the notion of minimal selves. The subjectivity of existence is warranted even in the absence of a permanent subject of those experiences. Furthermore, Buddhism would be in a position to tell us exactly what they think about the nature of relation existing between the minimal subjects of experience and the sense of a persisting self. How do we come to experience a sense of persistence and permanence which probably is not there, an illusion of the highest degree?

It is probably the subjectivity of consciousness that causes us to think there should be a subject of consciousness, and unmistakably there cannot be conscious experiences without subjectivity as such. There might not be consciousness existing as an ontological category without any kind of subjective bondage, though religious thinkers might like to believe otherwise. Thus, what Buddhism admits to be real is the subjectivity of experiences, and at the same time they maintain that this is caused by the fleeting sensory experiences. Moreover, the sense of self that is reified or constructed from something that is non permanent becomes a greater mistake. For Dharmakirti, we are mistaking a sense of self either from the mineness of subjective experience or from the 'I-maker' self-awareness that emerges over time. The sense of self at the core of phenomenal consciousness (*svasamvedana*) is indeed very real. This quality, for Dharmakirti, is subjectivity: it is what makes consciousness the unique phenomenon that it is. And each act of cognition thus has this aspect of subjectivity.[31]

Now how does that add up to form the sense of an enduring self or why do persons mistake themselves to be existing permanently over time as the same individuals and come to believe that there is something substantial in them irrespective of the fleeting nature of the world? If our experiences of the world are real and appreciated as one's own experiences, can the sense of me as a temporally extended and historically located subject be real as well?

The *sense* of me as a temporal being is true, I experience it beyond doubt. But the error arises when I identify or take for real a persisting self, as the underlying reason for my subjective experiences and for that *sense*. The mistake is not in thinking that there is a sense of self but

[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., p. 33.

in thinking that this sense entails a substantial self and it is due to our tendency to reify a sense of self at the core of subjective experience.

> ...[w]e reify either, on one hand, the self-reflexive, first-personal character of conscious states – falsely assuming that the mineness of experience picks out a permanent, substantial *me* – or, on the other hand, the broader form of 'I-maker' self-awareness that emerges over time, and which is fed by the first-person perspective of *svasamvedana*.[32]

We are creating something fictional from something real, the fictional sense of self as a permanent thing from the reality of fleeting subjective experience. Much before Hume, the Buddhists in the East had attempted such an explanation of the enigma of unity and continuity as a combination of all the momentary phenomenological experiences that we have. The thought that there might not be a separate self entity existing at all in the first place, enjoyed place of significance in philosophical thoughts in the East more than in the west. When certain Eastern thinkers held the view that thoughts about the persisting existence of self might be the biggest error trapping one to the world of pains and miseries, the sense of self was considered so unmistaken in the West and in fact was worked out as the only mode of having self-knowledge that one could be sure about without any chance of error. Our pondering about who we are is necessitated by this realisation that we remain numerically single and temporally the same person irrespective of all those psychophysical changes perceived to be going on in and about ourselves.

What comes to mind as the most practical usage of the term self is this dubious notion of *person* that endures through time with experiential unity and numerical singularity and not that of the more real minimal self - though we can make sense of it scientifically and philosophically. The common approach to the notion of self goes much beyond that of the minimal self. If momentary existence of minimal subjects of phenomenological experience without the capacity to language or concepts marks one end of our story, at the other end, we are but language-using temporal beings capable of becoming conscious of ourselves. Person is a larger concept, encompassing everything that we associate with a rational individual:

> ... intelligence, self-awareness, self-control, sense of time, sense of futurity, sense of the past, capacity to relate to others, concern for others, communication with other persons, control of

[32] Ibid., p. 34.

existence, curiosity, change and changeability, balance of rationality and feeling, idiosyncrasy, and neocortical function.[33]

Apparently, the first to attempt a definition of person was the sixth century philosopher, Boethius. He defined person as an individual substance of a rational nature.[34] The difference in the understanding of self and person was made clear by John Locke and later the concept of person was made robust by Immanuel Kant. As we have seen while defining person in the first chapter, Locke explained persons to be beings with reason and reflection, and which can become conscious of its identity at different times and places. And the consciousness which is inseparable from a person's thinking he considered to be its essential nature. So what we have now are two concepts: the phenomenological pre-narrrative selves; and the temporally extended social selves. The sense of having both of them is unmistakable and we have seen that the sense of a minimal self is without some pinch of reality. So can we look at how these two are related – the real minimal selves of phenomenological experiences and the fictional enduring selves?

Are these two stages of individual existence - pre-reflective self function and full blown self-conscious experiences - causally related or do they function independently? In fact, while talking about ourselves as selves, it would be difficult to understand the minimalist nature of ours as such. It is almost impossible to catch the momentary self, or the phenomenological subject of experience that we are, without reference to the temporal self. The moment such a concept is formed, we get to connect it with a past and a future, as it is difficult to conceive something that exists independently of any timeframe. The concept of a minimal self becomes possible only in the light of me existing as a bigger self, in whose story these particular experiences are framed into. Are we trying to locate the minimal self here as a constituent part of the larger self-concept that we have or are we trying to understand the larger self as an outcome of the meaningfully bonded minimal selves? Can it be considered that the real minimal selves of phenomenal experiences become the structures or contents of the narrated fiction of enduring selves?

It seems we are back at the debate of self's existence once again. Even while agreeing that self is a constructed notion and a story, we are faced with something more foundational and given, something that we cannot deny. Being embodied with such a highly evolved organism,

[33] Farah and Heberlein, "Personhood and Neuroscience", p. 38.
[34] Ibid., p. 37.

we are not only selves in a very minimal sense, but also individuals with the capacity to be conscious of such experiences and to connect them with a past and a future. Can we still look for the secrets of experienced continuity while appreciating the thought that there may not be anything substantial and permanent behind it after all, but just the momentary, impermanent flames? We have repeatedly seen that,

> …[s]ince experience is always in flux, an ever-flowing stream of (first personal) acts and first-personally given experiential phenomena (i.e. objects)—and since, moreover, the minimal phenomenal self is identical with its experiences, as Zahavi argues—it follows that the stream self is constantly changing. In other words, there is no numerically identical minimal phenomenal self.[35]

If such is the case, can we look to the Buddhist tradition wherein the creation of empty persons as compound entities is appreciated for a way out? If the first-person perspective, or the subject to whom the world is given in a first-personal mode of representation, is phenomenologically and ontologically prior to the narrative self,[36] can pre-reflective selves be considered as the ever changing components of Buddhist persons – the constituted selves?

So our issue of debate returns to be the relation between the so called minimal selves and the temporally existing persons that we think we are. So what we have are minimal selves, unrelated first-personal experiences of the world in continual motion. If all that given are but phenomenological pre-reflexive subjects, how are they then threaded to make the temporally extended selves that we are? Do the minimal selves function independently or do they end up being beaded into the chain we call self-concept? It seems that the pre-narrative selves are possible even without the existence of a narrative self, as evidenced in cases of people with no capacity to form memories,[37] but it cannot be the other way round as evidenced in the case of persons with no capacity to own their experiences.[38] Thus, our thoughts are logically led to the conclusion that the minimal selves as subjects of experiences might be becoming pre-narrative fodder for later narratives and that the pre-narrative selves are necessary structures or building blocks of autobiographical selves or narrative personhood. He claims that personhood is a more articulated, but ultimately derivative notion, phenomenologically and ontologically depended upon the experimental primacy of a minimal phenomenal self. The

[35] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 51.
[36] Ibid., p. 38.
[37] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens,* p. 118.
[38] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind,* p. 233.

minimal self is therefore a condition of possibility for developing more articulated forms of narrative personhood: pre-narrative experiences give structure to, and provide content for, narratives.[39]

And if we understand pre-narrative selves to be the fundamental constituting factors, based on which the story of our lives are woven, we may understand a human being as consisting of a series of such transient selves, each one lasting only as long as a unique experience lasts, coming into existence and going out of existence, without continuity.[40] Interpreting them and threading them into a meaningful narrative is a different process, albeit on the foundations of these phenomenological experiences. The process of marking those seemingly mechanical and instinctual singular phenomenological experiences as 'mine' or recognising them as such, and meaningfully crafting them into a long narration or into the referent entity of the personal pronoun "I" is a philosophical issue that has baffled every bundle theorists and seems to be the key to the creating of the sense of oneself.

Are we now really looking into the secrets of unity of experience or the secrets of consciousness about them instead of a permanent substantial existence within? William James might surprise us with the concept of the stream of consciousness after admitting that the self is nothing but a fragmented whole. He believed that understanding the changing nature of the 'I' did not necessitate settling ontological problems. 'I' is "...a Thought, at each moment different from that of the last moment, but appropriate of the latter, together with all that the latter called its own"[41]. For a scientific understanding of the nature of the subjective "I" all that one needs to be clear about, are but the empirical relation existing between one's experience, one's brain, and one's social relations. Equally fascinating is the whole process of narrative constitution of the self. We do not know for clear the mechanisms that underlie our process of storytelling. But yes, even science has begun speculating on philosophical topics from such lines of thought.

The process of narration and unification, though sounds simple an act, it is not that straight forward an action, explains Antonio Damasio.[42] He has walked extra miles from his neuroscientist's lab to the alleys of speculation in explaining difficulties involved in the process of meaningfully relating minimal selves and narrative selves, creating stories of

[39] Menary, "Embodied Narratives", p. 79.
[40] Gallagher, "Philosophical conceptions of the self", Pp. 17-18.
[41] James, *Principles of Psychology*, Pp. 400-1.
[42] See Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, Chapters 8 and 9.

persons with time and language concepts. He believes that these complexities have to be explained at the personal, sub-personal and the neurological levels. We will discuss these processes in detail in the coming sections.

The process of building a notion of oneself is also complex for the reason that it is dynamic. There is no one single concept that runs throughout once made. The episodic memories, that we base our stories on, go through a composite metrics of innate and instinctual dispositions and a cultural and environmental nexus, in their formation, remodelling and preservation. Similarly, the concept of self goes through continuous process of evaluation and modification too. This notion works as theory or a measuring rod for further experiences and gets itself reformed in the process. The process of making "mine" the phenomenological experiences of the minimal self also includes a theory of mind; and here the theory is the reiterated sense of self that I perceive to be myself. Neisser in his "Five Kinds of Self Knowledge" opines that just as what we perceive in the world and how we interpret them is substantially dependent on what we already believe, isolating the facts from what is told to and said about myself equally depends on what I believe myself to be. In such cases, he thinks, self should be considered as a theory rather than an independently existing entity.

It is based on this theory that I have about myself, I embroider such experiential memories into the gown that I have been sewing every moment of my life, or which is the process of my life. Once the phenomenological experiential episodes are marked as my own, once they are owned in immediate consciousness, the owning organism is faced with the question of its identity. Who has the experiences? The question about the owner or agent forces the organism to reflect about itself and in turn it comes up with a narration of what the organism thinks it is. This we call the narrative accounts of the self. The organism, or a person by now, is in constant pressure to make, modify and present stories about what the agent of such experiences look like and in return these stories or concepts of the self influences his experiences of the world further.

The nature of this constructed self is debatable, which we will look in detail in the final chapter. For the time being, it is enough that we conclude that there is no substantially existing self than the capable human organism and its function of meaningfully relating to the world around and narrating the relation. We will look at how the organism devises a process of narrating its relation with the world and comes up, in the process, with a story of its own nature in the next section.

2.4. Autobiography-ing as the Process of Narration

Even while agreeing on the momentary nature of minimal subjects of experience, we are surprised at how these get threaded into full blown self notions – how do they get related and cohesive in the absence of a unifying agent? Even though the stimuli causing particular experiences are public, the experience of them remains very much private and first personal. We find some form of similarity existing between them as far as they are our own experience. Each one has a unique way of experiencing the world, and moreover, we remember them as having happened to us and we find plans being made about their possible recurrence in the future. There is a first person perspective added to our experiences and may be this subjectivity produces in us the sort of continuity of experience required for the emergence of a sense of an enduring self as the subject of these experience.

The similarity, identity, and continuity of experiences, we may consider easier to understand if they belong to a substratum, something that does not change irrespective of all the changes happening around. Many thinkers, especially the contemporary philosophers of mind, consider this notion of an enduring self as the subject of experience to be the biggest illusion that we might be living with each waking moment. We have seen how philosophers were particularly sceptic about this assumed nature of self and thinkers like Nietzsche went vocal in displaying their displeasure. He categorically denied that there was some underlying reality behind all our experiences. All that there could be was nothing but "the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum: but it is we who first created the "similarity" of these states; our adjusting them and making them similar is the fact, not their similarity, which ought rather to be denied"[43]. He stated that we not only create the sense of an enduring entity from the seemingly unified and identical experiences but also it is we ourselves who create such a seeming similarity between the experiences in the first place. It would be clear if we understand how the sense of self works as a theory of mind determining our further experiences of the world.

The debate on the question of self has become one between essence versus process and discovery versus invention. The postmodernist paradigms not only challenge traditional answers to our questions about the nature of self but challenge the very questions being posed. Considering the rejection of a central substantial agent, there is then a logical need to explain how the perceived sense of self is made possible and the nature of its constitutive

[43] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Pp. 268-69.

mechanism. If self is not a possessor being of our innumerable conscious episodes, how come we have a feeling that we are the same enduring epistemological subjects, moral agents, and aesthetic recipients in these diverse experiences? How do we come to appreciate all those varying experiences as belonging to the same person and preserve that sense? Daniel Dennett sees the capacity to tell stories as our biggest advantage and finds in it the secret to our sense of self.

> *Our* fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is not building dams or spinning webs, but telling stories--and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others--and ourselves--about who we are.[44]

The process of narration is what probably gives us a sense of relative permanence and the notion of self is a resultant abstraction. One of our most distinct traits is that "we don't just reason – we tell stories about how we reason"[45] and of course it follows that "who we are is a story of our self – a constructed narrative that our brain creates".[46] It may be with the help of this capacity to narrate that we connect the singular episodes of phenomenological experiences into meaningful stories. In turn, might be born our story of the self, the protagonist and the author. The concept of autobiographical self is expansively detailed in the recent work of Antonio Damasio, *The Self Comes to Mind*. It is through a process of autobiography-ing that we come to weave the story of ourselves, he claims and this, in turn, weaves us. There is a whole process of narration involved in one's making of the story of oneself and we may figuratively understand the minimal selves to be the building blocks of narrative selves.

Contemporary narrative theories of self are an extension of the position that the notion of self is a useful fiction and these are backed up by current findings in neuroscience and other related sciences. It is a generally held view that there can be neither simplicity at any given point of time as far as our experience are concerned nor there can be any identity of experiences on a given scale of time, as we will see in the next chapter in detail. If there is anything that is relatively identical and permanent is, it is the biological organism, the minimal self, momentary subject of phenomenological experience. But the possession of a body that functions as the unit of distinction, isolating itself from everything else that it is not, is something man shares with the non-human animal species as well. The capacity to

[44] Dennett, "The Origins of Selves."
[45] MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 16.
[46] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. xi.

experience the world in its body does not guarantee its being an identical being across time; the capacity to own those experiences and to become conscious of that possession, and the ability to join the new experiences with other experiences, remembered or anticipated, but do. This might be what helps man to be something different from and unique than what non-human animal species are.

What we additionally have might be a complex system of thought and expression, the capacity to language. We take much pain to express our private experiences colourfully: we add our remembered experiences of related nature, our imaginations as to what such particular experiences might add up to, and our expectations as to how we are going to deal with them in future. We use language in a way that the public understands our emotions meaningfully and the ones expert at expressing their feelings are considered masters among men. We invent words to bead our experiences. The public expression of abstract and physical experiences through language might be the key to how we make ourselves to be. And language usage has been such that without subjects, we do not understand actions. So much so, that we have to invent subjects where there is none like in cases of raining or lightening. We say "it rains" or "it flashes". Why then an exception be made when it is about the *who* that owns all that is being narrated about? A subject has to be invented, beautifully presented as to please the audience, and this notion of a subject functions as a theory to further approach our experiences with. Now they are going to be experiences of "someone" significant, *mine*.

The invention that took place in the process of narration now becomes the identity of the narrator. The process of narration is so powerful that in the opinion of Dennett, "for the most part we don't spin them [the stories]; they spin us"[47] and the concept of self is a necessary by-product of this narrative process. Dennett claims that we are hardwired to the usage of language, being social beings of communicating power and once this process has been set in motion there is no real escape as such from the game.

The process of storytelling might be an interesting function in itself. Faced with the question as to who experiences the world, or who feels the emotions, we set to tell who it is. In the process of creating a fiction, the novelist creates a character who is fit to experience certain emotions, thoughts and who can or cannot do certain acts. Once the character has been described and set in motion, the author is limited as to the future choice of thoughts, words

[47] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 418.

and acts that he can relate this particular character to. And at times when the character behaves unbecoming of its nature, the readers are puzzled and left to reason out its cause. The author's success is marked by his creation of coherent characters and events that match to each other's needs and nature. The actions and words have to be justified. So the author emphasises certain aspects and negates certain others. This is what exactly happens in the process of authoring an autobiography in normal life as well. Authors emphasise what they consider fit and significant for the world to know and consciously omits events that they are ashamed to admit and own as such thoughts and actions do not fit into the nature of persons that they want to portray themselves to be. If this is the case with fiction writing and memoir recording how much more complex would it be in real life when persons make themselves up, albeit mostly in an unconscious way?

The functioning of the brain, we believe, is so set that it creates associations between events and thoughts to fit them into coherent stories. Coherent stories mean that we accept those events fitting in and delete those odd cases of exception. The story is ever in need of being revised, reformed and retold as the situation demands, and as a result of these conscious and unconscious processes, we end up becoming dynamic stories. The histories get modified, the language gets amplified, the hues get refreshed and renewed, and the emergent central character remains as dynamic as the story is. This process of self narration is not a less significant art and people do miserably fail in presenting attractive stories of themselves.

The process of narration isn't foolproof as well. The memories are ours and their vulnerability to error and manipulation has become a hot topic of consideration in science, and it is beyond doubt that we record and later even modify memories as per our personalised needs. As researches point out, "it turns out that memories are fluid, modified by context and sometimes simply confabulated. This means, we cannot trust them and our sense of self is compromised."[48] A major portion of our stories end up being what we think we should be, a kind of deception that strips our stories of their objectivity. This has been called the 'totalitarian ego' in which we repress, distort and ignore negative aspects of our lives that do not fit with our idealized self-narrative.[49] We vividly and repeatedly present those memories that we think fit very well into the schema of our stories and add additional colouring to them but at the expense of those real events that we think might not fit into the story. "If we believe that we have a particular trait of personality then we selectively interpret events that are

[48] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 60.
[49] Greenwald, "The Totalitarian Ego", p. 603-18.

consistent with that belief. In fact, we can easily interpret general statements to make them seem particularly relevant to us."[50] People even form different narratives for different occasions and end up being relatively distinct central characters. It is our ability to choose what is fitting into our coherent story that probably gives us some kind of identity, similarity and unity.

Now a question might probably rise as to who decides which thoughts or events are to be chosen to be amplified and presented and which are to be censored in the narration process. Should there not be an editor who interprets facts and situations, suppresses unwanted and unfitting material, keeps track of the new inputs and importantly reframes the existing material according to the new data and information received. Who does that? If we are stories, then who tells the story? How does narration happen and a novelist emerge out of his own story? Is it internally or externally controlled? The abounding questions seem to warrant the existence of an intelligent agent in the unconscious material body.

There are strong alternative readings as well. There have been attempts to explain the whole exercise without the active role or presence of any central agent who does the work of an editor of our experiences. Consciousness is almost an autonomous situation where each of the event or impression struggles to get noticed. And the visibility of them depends on factors like their relevance and intensity.

> Just as the Darwinian concept of evolution does not involve a superior authority that choose which species should survive ..., so there is no superior authority (the soul, the self, the 'I' whatever) to choose which drafts will actually pop up as the content of consciousness. In each case, the question of which draft will proceed further is decided by the relative strength and mutual dynamics of the contenders.[51]

It seems that the entire process of consciousness is self-regulated and there is no central figure who is directing the game. This might all be happening as purely automatic processes, after all. Dennett argues that "*...we,* (unlike *professional* human storytellers) do not consciously and deliberately figure out what narratives to tell and how to tell them; like spider webs, our tales are *spun by us*; our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their *product*, not their *source."*[52] The argument's similarity to the Humean position that there

[50] Hood, *The self Illusion*, p. 172.
[51] Bertelsen, *Free Will, Consciousness and Self*, p.178.
[52] Dennett, "The Origins of Selves."

is none inside to be found, but impressions and perceptions alone, which are cohered into one by imagination, is to be noted here. Extending it with the claim of Dennett, things seem to be getting clearer.

The biggest illusion that we have is of an agent who decides what is relevant to us, or how we should behave, what is right and wrong for us, and who is in charge of our thoughts and decisions. Daniel Dennett is clear in rejecting any such central agent who is responsible for making any use of our mind and its resources. He says that there aren't any captains in the ship,

> ... there is no conscious self that is unproblematically in command of the mind's resources. Rather, we are somewhat disunified. Our component modules have to act in opportunistic but amazingly resourceful ways to produce a modicum of behavioural unity, which is then enhanced by an illusion of greater unity.[53]

What both Dennett and Bertelsen reject is a central agent or what we have come to expose throughout the previous sections as the enduring self. But it becomes difficult to imagine that the mind functions as a jungle where the species fight over for survival without any preordained script. Can complex happenings like the human mechanism be one such? The human story does not sound to be devoid of any direction. In the discussions above we have seen that deliberate decisions are to be made as to which memories are to be refreshed and how things should be made look significant or trivial. There is a script running in the case of human story telling. To agree with Dennett or Bertelsen would only be in matters related to the initial stages of human existence. Once the concept of self is formed, though as a useful fiction, the mind does not work without direction, we must assume.

This issue seems to be resolvable if the idea of Neisser discussed in the previous section is remembered here. The self-concept once formed, does not leave us in complete freedom. It works as a theory of mind for us to meaningfully relate to the world.[54] The notion of self, albeit an abstract one, formed from the different aspects of the embodied organism (and constructed may be in the lines discussed here) decides what we perceive and how we interpret so as to keep them within the frame of narration. We may not be working without any direction but without a real director.

[53] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity".
[54] Neisser, "Five Kinds of Self Knowledge", p. 401.

Though it seems to be a practical theory about the origins of persons, the narrative accounts of self also seemingly do not escape from certain questions. Nothing comes abruptly from somewhere. There has to be a beginning. The story should have a background, and someone to initiate the narrative. How and where does the story begin and one becomes a narrator? What is the process involved in owning and uniting the experiences? The process of narrating one's sense of self is further evidenced by studies in neonates in developmental psychology. How neonates - let us assume that they are "*tabula rasas"* having only instinctual capacity to experience own, and become conscious - come to experience the world and end up making stories about what they experience? Who are the owners of their experiences? We will look in detail into the developmental aspects of children as far as their self-making processes are concerned.

2.5. What is it like to be an Infant? - Origins of Autobiographical Selves

The reality of phenomenal experience and the undeniable nature of subjectivity do not necessarily warrant the existence of an enduring substantial being as the subject of experiences. In Dennett we saw how in the absence of a captain there is a Darwinian struggle among the drafts in the mind to get noted and become conscious. But we also saw that the ongoing process of self formulation might not be a complete script-less play left to the mercy of coincidence and destiny. Taking note of the view from Neisser that once a concept of self is formed, it functions as a theory of mind for further experiences and interpretations. The design of Dennett might be true for the initial years when there is no self-concept at work and the organism is almost a passive receiver, trying to make a meaningful existence. And notably the human infants take longer time to set its house in place. This is not only for us to learn from others, but also for learning to become like others. Becoming like others and getting on with them involves creating sense of who we are – a participating member of the human species.[55] The way infants interact with the world, discover their separateness from the world and come to form a concept about who they are is rather a complex mystery that begs to be unravelled.

Infants do not come with a concept of who they are. It takes them years to recognize who they are and form that recognition into meaningful narratives, ready to be presented to themselves and to the public. At the same time, it is an undeniable fact they undergo experiences a few hours after birth, or even before birth.

[55] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. xii.

> In contrast to the unfortunate babies born with brain damage, healthy infants are equipped with a brain that is designed to learn about its environment and this learning starts very early. We now know that the unborn baby can learn the sound of their mother's voice, develop a preference for the food she eats while pregnant and even remember the theme tune to the TV soap operas she watches while waiting for the big day to arrive.[56]

They come with a capacity to experience the world and themselves in a way that belongs to them alone. They are beings capable of responding to such experiences as having understood to be happening to them. The ability to connect those experiences into meaningful narratives presents them with a concept of themselves as distinct from the world and then the development of their masterpiece begins, which would turn out to be themselves.

How does the process begin and what would the situation look like in the absence of a proper self-concept in the infants? Every story has to be located in a history and we must assume that every human infant is born with a history or in the sense of narration he/she is born into a plot. This is a given-ness with no chance of changing. The persons that we have to relate with, the situations that we have to be nurtured in, the persons who will train us, the times of the world that would influence our thinking and life all form parts of this given plot of ours - aspects of one's self that are to be discovered. From a biological perspective, we are also restricted by a given way that belongs differently to each individual organism, of choosing the environments that best fit the organism, of experiencing and responding to it and its stimuli in unique ways.

Differences in temperance make children's ways of perceiving and responding to public events unique and hence give them the much required sense of uniqueness and identity as separate from others. These differences we must admit, to be scientifically true, are given or genetically determined. These biological differences are there to stay, influencing the environmental conditions as they are selected and interacted with in ways to fit with the temperamental conditioning of the children. It is a proven fact that we perceive and even choose to perceive the world in ways that are significant to us. Though it is not known how the human brain maps the world outside its brain, the body proper and objects in the world,

[56] Hood, *The Self Illusion,* p.14. These instances are reported in DeCasper and Spence, "Prenatal maternal speech influences newborns' perception of speech sounds"; and Hepper, "An examination of foetal learning before and after birth".

> [i]t is not a mere copy, a passive transfer from the outside of the brain toward its inside. The assembly conjured by the senses involves an active contribution offered from inside the brain, available from early in development, the idea that the brain is a blank slate having long since lost favor.[57]

The same stimuli in the world fail to produce the same experience in different organisms. To go the biological way, we must appreciate that this different ways of responding to the world are unique to each individual due to the genetic determinants of its physiology even before a theory of mind or say a concept of self is formed, helping in deciding what to perceive and how to perceive.

The infant organism's unique biological way of choosing and reacting to its environments would influence the way its personality or concept of self is formed. Thus, it turns out to be that even as infants with no self-concept we are not completely free in determining what we should become and how we should tell the world what we have become. May be this absence of freedom implies the absence of conscious responsibility and that might help in understanding why we do not consider the whole narration process to be tedious – the whole process does not bother us much. It is bound to happen and we have not much to do with it unless we take conscious efforts.

In similar ways, the biologically determined nature of the organism influences the world and the organism's development in very many different ways. It influences the way others respond to the child: in a similar given social context a shy child might be ignored whereas an extrovert child might be the source of a whole lot of new social happening of pleasant exchanges. The environments that the infant or child chooses to grow up is influenced by its biological dispositions as well. The genetic given-ness of the child determines whether he/she should be spending time in physically engaging outdoor or mentally engaging indoor activities. While not forgetting the significance of the availability of the environments, we notice how different children tend to respond to same environments. The curiosity and joy to know new ways and things differ in individual infants in a significant way, determining how they interact with the world and what kind of self-concept they are bound to develop. These biological differences of the organisms influence the environmental exchange of experience

[57] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, p. 64.

for each infant or child in a long way. And in turn, they influence the way a child develops a theory of the world and more significantly theory of self, a self-concept.[58]

Bruce Hood, a developmental psychologist, agrees to this position and explains that we are born with a unique predisposition to the world. We are conditioned to be receptive and responding. We are beings that come with first person perspectives. Children are born with a sense of bodily boundaries and internal disposition to learn, imitate and control. They just do it like other animals and the sense of individuality slowly emerges. It seems the child has a proto-self and the capacity to register experience as unrelated episodes. What they lack is the storytelling ability. This has to be developed and for this to happen the individual should be able to appreciate the presence of other characters. And without a theory of mind this process is impossible as evidenced by difficulties faced by children with autism. In the course of early childhood, normal children,

> ...increasingly become more sophisticated at understanding other people because of their developing theory of mind. … [b]y four years of age, children have become expert at working the social arena. They will copy, imitate, mimic and generally empathize with others, thereby signalling that they too are part of the social circles that we all must join in order to become members of the tribe. They share the same socially contagious behaviours of crying, yawning, smiling, laughing and showing disgust.[59]

We need to appreciate the presence of pre-narrative self/selves prior to the development of narrative construction of the person, as seen in discussions before. There is good evidence that the 'minimal self' or minimal self-awareness is already operative in new born humans, if we understand it to include embodied ecological and interpersonal aspects.[60] It is true that even the neonates (who are not yet considered persons) are able to have phenomenological experiences. We know they come with a brain operating system that has evolved to learn certain things about the world and ignore other stuff that is not of use to them,[61] though we do not know when they begin to connect these episodes and start threading their stories. But it is also considered that a complex self function is set in motion sooner.

> Over the course of the first months of life, however, and especially in the contexts of inter subjective interaction, self and self-awareness develop to the significant point of an objective

[58] "Personality Development - A Biological Perspective on Personality Development", *social.jrank.org*.
[59] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 65.
[60] Gallagher, "Introduction: A Diversity of Selves", p. 3.
[61] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 25.

> and conceptually born self-recognition. The notion of self recognition, however, is itself complex, ranging from primitive non-conscious bodily process (as in the immune system) to sophisticated aspects of self-consciousness in human adults.[62]

Any rudimentary sense of self that the neonates come to possess has to happen from their experience of being embodied and situated creatures. This immediate acquaintance with oneself as an embodied perspective on the world is a phenomenologically minimal form of self-experience.[63] The experience of embodiment is something that cannot be denied and we are bound to experience it as a way of differentiating from everything that one is not, the not-self. It is true that the neonates lack the linguistic capacity to coin their experiences into a narration or to understand such narratives. But the fact of their subjective experience of the world cannot be rejected:

> It now appears that even very young infants present a surprisingly rich form of self-awareness rooted in an ecological experience of their body and their body's practical relation to the world. They seem to grasp implicitly that they have a body, and they feel that this body can be made to do things, including imitate the expressions and gestures of others—despite neither having seen their body nor possessing any sort of linguistic or narrative understanding of it.[64]

Hazlitt in the beginning of the nineteenth century began his three step development theory of self from this undeniable fact that young children can experience the world and come to recognise themselves as bodily beings who are capable of experiencing pain and pleasure. Since they are limited to a body, they are capable of remembering only their own past, and the memories are incorporated into the awareness of their bodily existence. Once thoughts, expectations and plans for the future can be included into the scheme, the human infants are there to stay as persons with meaningful narratives.[65]

From the analysis of the nature of voluntary self, Maine de Biran, a developmental psychologist, explained infants' realisation of their identity through the resistance they experienced about their desires from the world. The continuity of voluntary agency is what provides the young humans with a sense of their existence across an extended period of time,

[62] Gallagher, "Introduction: A Diversity of Selves", p. 3.
[63] Krueger., "The who and the How of Experience", p. 42.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Barressi and Martin, "History as Prologue – Western Theories of the Self", p. 45.

he claimed.[66] It was through this realisation that the child overcomes a purely sensitive, animal existence to reach a state of existential freedom which culminates into abstract spiritual experiences transcending the world. It is in a way similar to the understanding of the rediscovery of the self in modernity through a criticism of religion and state, explaining how individuals become conscious of themselves in resistance from and to the world.

Self-concept that one acquires is but knowledge about one's bodily features, physical and mental abilities, temperaments and personality traits, values and goals etc. It is the need to relate to the world that forces children to acquire proper knowledge about themselves beginning from infancy. From physical concrete attributes in the childhood knowledge about oneself moves on to psychological and then to more abstract and complex attributes as one grows physically in time. In a similar way as that of Neisser, the German psychologist Johann Friedrich Herbart explained how human infants develop the abstract concept of self. The bodily activities that the infants perceive provide them with some sense of themselves and of the world as distinct from each other. The memories about the ecological and interpersonal aspects of the self assist the organism in connecting the past with thoughts of the present and the future, granting some kind of extension to the concept of self. By thoughtfully relating them with the world, with their own thoughts and intentions, they come to identify themselves with more of ideas than with their body. Thus begins the process of forming a concept of the ego as the subject of their abstract thoughts and bodily experiences – a notion of who they are.

It is assumed that human infants do not develop proper self-concepts well into their second year from the fact they fail the mirror test or they fail to recognise themselves in the mirror until well into their second year. Prior to that, the baby takes its own reflection in the mirror for another child. Some might argue that the failure to recognize oneself in the mirror is due to lack of a sense of self.[67] This might be evident from another fact that many do not have any memory of their childhood before their second birthday and, even if there are, they are fragmented and unconnected.[68] But this may not be because we did not have the facility to form any new memory of the time but mostly because we did not have a notion of self to which these memories were to be related. The fact that we failed to have any memories of our

[66] Ibid.
[67] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, Pp. 53-54.
[68] Bruce, et.al. "On the Transition from Childhood Amnesia to the Recall of Personal Memories", Pp. 360-64.

infancy for the reason that "we" simply were not there, mean to say that there was no constructed concept of self to whom the experiences seemed relevant. We simply failed to see any relevance those events in our infancy had for us as individuals.

> This may be why there is no memory of the infantile self. As an infant we did not have the capacity to integrate our experiences into meaningful stories. We did not have world knowledge. Most important, we did not have an idea of who we were. We did not have an initial sense of self to integrate our experiences. That requires world experience and, in particular, learning from those about us who spend so much time in our company. Somewhere around two years, children start to have conversations with parents about past events.[69]

Or rather, the memories might be existing as unconscious contents to which we have no access and therefore become memories that we can neither recall nor retell as events in the stories we tell about ourselves. They just slip off our narratives or simply do not exist. It cannot be true that young infants do not have memories. However, all the memories that the infants possess do not become part of their self story that most of us rehearse and recall when we are much older and asked to reminisce.[70] We lacked the ability to reflect on them and later recall them as experiences happened to us.

Mind, it seems, does not function like a passive repository of information about the past. Rather it stores memories as related to the particular organism. Subjectivity highly assists in the formation of memory and once the event is related to us it becomes difficult to forget. Memories are easier to be remembered when we are one of the main characters in the event and for that to happen we need to have a knowledge about the world and about oneself. Memories can be chipped into or coloured by the concept of self that we already have about the character experiencing that particular event, oneself.

Babies are little pitiable creatures having not much control over neither their bodies nor their worlds. They are simple potentialities yet and it is too much to expect of them to have any sense of what they are. In such a condition, where do we come to develop such a sense as to who we are if not in the company of others? The tribe has great roles to play in the infants' making of meaningful narratives – in children making sense of themselves as distinctively independent individuals. As we grow through infancy and childhood somewhere in the line we try to recognise who we are and how much we mattered to others, leading us often to

[69] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 60.
[70] Ibid., p. 56.

mistaken worlds of assumed significance. Are not child's desperate attempts to seek attention and get respect, simply ways of telling others that it is aware of its existence, and demanding respect for that?

But are we not playing the game rather on unexpected lines too? As adults, we do not pay much attention to all that children do and say but still act otherwise in order not to hurt their feelings. But as a result, children might be illusioned in thinking that they are in control of how things and events turn out as far as they are directly directed to their thoughts and actions. The case is that it is not only the children, but the adults too are controlled by the society in deciding and how they should perform, and fooled into thinking that they are in command. There is always a pressure of relating to the society.

> The self illusion ensures that we are either oblivious of the extent to which we mimic others or think that we deliberately copy others. When we act socially we think that we are calling the shots and pulling the strings but this belief in autonomy is part of the illusion. We are much more dependent on others than we appreciate. We want to be part of the group but that, in turn, means we have to control our behaviours.[71]

We might be imitating others much more than we realise just as the unconscious infants do in returning smiles and facial expressions. We expect to be accepted and valued in the groups that we find ourselves in and that is a burden that we carry till the end of this particular organism's social existence. We need to control our behaviours for the said reason, and to make this happen we need to have an awareness of what others think and expect of us. Well, we are on to the road to becoming proficient story narrators about who we are and why we behave a particular way. And for sure the drive on the way cannot be a private adventure, but always in company of others. If it was a private one, we did not need to take on this emotionally strenuous journey of reflecting on the self-function at all.

2.6. Co-Biographers: Role of the Other

Human infants develop in the long run the storytelling ability that they lack initially. For this to happen, the individual should be able to appreciate the presence of other characters as connoisseurs of their narratives and without having some notion of their own minds this process is impossible as made evident in the difficulties faced by children with autism. If we look at infants, they are not initially self-conscious. Somewhere along the path of childhood

[71] Ibid., p. 50.

they start developing a sense of self-identity and pride. As they discover who they are, they come to value their self, based on what others think.[72] My inference of what others think of me thus becomes an important part of my self-concept. It becomes special and true knowledge only on reflective thinking – when I think if the other is right about his/her idea of me. My inference about others' notion of me is sieved through my own judgment about myself.

If it is true that we are narrators of our own story as seen in the previous sections, then it is also equally true that the narration is necessitated by others to whom we should present a report of the experiencing subject that we think we are. If the others weren't there it would have been a difficult position to prove that there would be any question of self-concept at all. The story that we form by coining numerous experiences is told to others first and then to ourselves as it is in the presence of others that we come to recognise ourselves, as self-conscious beings like them. More than themselves, children become aware of others initially and it is in recognizing themselves as trying to imitate others that they become conscious of themselves as imitating subjects of experience. In expressing their own inner world to others they become conscious of what others feel by expressing themselves similarly onto others. This gives the child an idea about mind in others and here at this realisation, a new person is born, claims the American Philosopher and psychologist, James Baldwin.[73] Process of self recognition and self understanding is thus a social affair, and it is only in the presence and with appreciation of others that one is capable of forming any narrative of the self.

> In humans, not only do we learn from others about the world around us, we also learn to become a self. In the process of watching others and trying to understand them, we come to discover who we are. ...the illusion of the reflected self we experience is constructed by those around us through our social interactions.[74]

From the imitating stages to the carefully crafted expressive stages of the self, the other is significant as motivators, spectators and the masters in charge of the narrating process. It is in the understanding of otherness that the need for recognising oneself as distinct from the other is located.

[72] Ibid.
[73] Baldwin, *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, p. 8.
[74] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 26.

For all these to happen, we need to be in a society. "Babies come with a brain operating system that has evolved to learn certain things about the world and ignore other stuff that is not of use to them. And the most important things to a human baby are other humans."[75] In the case of infants, they do require the positive presence and interaction of others for them to be able to form meaningful self-concepts just as they require nutrition and sustenance for survival. It is all the more important in the initial stages to develop a healthy concept of self as it would in turn work as a theory of mind for our future interactions with the world. Bruce Hood, a developmental scientist rejects our possibility of developing the sense of self that most of us have – an integrated, coherent individual existing independently as a member of a larger social group, in the absence of others.[76] It might be simply impossible for an organism to form a positive self-concept and to direct his experience of himself and the world and to control it in the absence of humans.

The way children are treated and provided company with by caring adults in the childhood seem to influence the way they form their self-concept and how they perceive the relationships with other adults later in life. Isolated infants end up having difficulty in fitting comfortably into the social scenario. It is considered that we need others to be happy in our life and it is an early realisation in infancy. Being abandoned or not cared leaves negative imprints on the way an individual perceives himself/herself and others later in life. Early social experiences have a say in what persons turn out to be, as they are but a continuation of the social exchange from that sensitive period of infancy when the seeds of self-concept and concept of other minds were being sown. It is to people whom we consider to have minds like ours that we narrate our stories to. It is also partly assisted by their presence and interaction. One needs to have a theory of other minds in order to interact meaningfully as a social being and to complete this engagement one has to have a model of one's own mind too. It is possible that either of the two was set in first and provoked the other or both of them coevolved and enriched each other. This must have ended in having the reflective self-consciousness that set us man apart.[77]

The significant contribution of others in the narrative nature of self-concept cannot be ignored. There is a social nature to this story making. The construction, to a great extent, depends on the 'other' around us and their intentions. "The selfhood of oneself implies

[75] Ibid., p. 25.
[76] Ibid., p. 44.
[77] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, p. 124.

otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought without the other",[78] asserts Paul Ricouer. Man's "identity is an attribute that is borrowed from his social setting, he is a point of intersection of numerous social relationships. He is a social construct."[79]

It has to be doubted if we are really in control of the stories that we frame. Is it not the tribe that makes us? It is so because, in the Heideggerian terms, we are thrown into a world. We do come into an already existing socio-cultural milieu. The history is given and it is beyond repair, all that one can do is to sprout within that context to become a beautiful flower drawing sustenance from its givenness. Macintyre explains how our story is embedded in the culture from which we drive our identity. "I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships… what I am, therefore, is a key part of what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present."[80] The cultural and geographical setting along with my familial background is the first plot from where I do, rather have to, draw my identity from.

Though this particular socio-cultural milieu would exist independently of my presence, I will have to depend on it for any kind of initiation into my self-concept. Though the existing cultural situation is same for everyone existing in a particular set up, the differences in experiencing and interpreting it has to be accounted for by the physiological differences that I am born with on a biological front. It is precisely for that distinctiveness of experience or what is called subjectivity in philosophical parlance, we are concerned about individual identity and the question of self. If everyone experienced the world in similar manner and responded similarly to the stimuli as though they were machines, the question of personal identity and self would not have been such a great mystery to tackle. The reductionists would have had their day all through.

Irrespective of this fact that there is a unique way for everyone to experience the world and to respond to its stimuli, there is something that I share with many in my community. There is a narrative into which I am born, a narrative that had been in circulation even before. I am born into it as a mere continuation of it, with the responsibility to take it ahead, in turn, creating my own personal narrations. My story had already been in usage even before I was a part of it. For the reason that I am located into a particular social and cultural location and not any

[78] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 3.
[79] Mohanty, *The Self and its Other*, p. 81.
[80] MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory*, Pp. 205-206.

other, determines mostly what kind of a story is expected of me. And expectations are either appreciated or condemned according to the will of the same society. Not only that the plot is set, but also I am mostly determined to see what I see and to respond the way I do, as seen while discussing the biological determinants of self development.

> Like every other aspect of human development, the emergence of the self is epigenetic – an interaction of the genes in the environment. The self emerges out of that journey through the epigenetic landscape combining the legacy of our genetic inheritance with the influence of the early environment to produce profound and lasting effects on how we develop socially. These effects, in turn, can shape the way we interact with others and raise our own children.[81]

The constraints do not stop here. Even after all these, I am not only under the influence of others in the same setup but also under control from them to behave in certain ways to get recognised and valued in the society. And not many take chance to overlook such regards.

> In a sense, who we are really comes down to those around us. We may all be born with different biological properties and dispositions but even these emerge in the context of others and in some cases can be triggered or turned off by environmental factors. … We may feel that we are the self treading down the path of life and making our own decisions at the various junctions and forks, but that would also assume we are free to make our choices. However, the freedom to make choices is another aspect of the self illusion.[82]

Once formed, our self-concepts are not steadily maintainable either. Regular revisiting of the concept takes place in each individual, though often unconsciously. If we take the case of self referencing, this might be clearer. We do refer to ourselves as entities existing across a time period and as independent entities in comparison to others. This temporal and the social referencing helps in making close evaluation of one's self-concept and in making it temporally and socially more stable. This happens through certain behavioural amendments to the individual's social existence.

Here what we end up are not as authors of our own stories but as co-authors or constrained editors.[83] We are restrained as far as the input is concerned and pressured down under expectations from the general readers. Which author would want to defy the logic of his readers? MacIntyre sounds very clear on this while stating,

[81] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 82.
[82] Ibid., Pp. 82-83.
[83] This will be discussed in detail in the final chapter of the work.

> [W]e are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives… in life, as both Aristotle and Engels noted, we are always under certain constraints. We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making.[84]

Even after claiming that there is no given selves and laying the entire onus on us for what we become, ultimately we end up realising that we may not be that free after all as was considered. This might be the reason, why we do not become conscious of the whole process of narration, except for a few circumstances when we deliberately rehearse what to be, often for deceiving self and others. Our self-understanding and formation is influenced and to a certain extent, determined by the co-authors existing in our life-worlds.

Our self-concept is but reactions to the world, a reflection of the world that is held up to us.[85] People fit themselves into various contexts and according to the company that they have to keep. The same person might behave differently in different social contexts, and the ones failing to draw some kind of coherence between the different roles that he/she plays is termed sick and taken in for need of treatment. We may here be tempted to think that we remain coherent and unitary individuals since there are certain cardinal traits that define our personality, which we might call the essence of our self. But how far is it a right inference? If an individual takes the same personality test from five different perspectives that he happens to be in, like the roles of a father, brother, employee, husband, and artist, the results might be presumably different.[86] We are how we respond to situations at hand, and persons around us constantly remind us of their expectations of what we would turn out to be, or constant reminders to change to be loved and accepted, which everyone is in undeniable need of.

We remember William James claiming that there might be as many social selves in a person as there are social groups that one has to be in. In relation to the number of persons one considers to be significant in one's life, one might end up having as many social faces. So it clears the table as to why people do not know each other completely. At no time, a person can be aware of all the aspects of another's self; even the person himself might not be. All that people know are only certain aspects of the personality of an individual and that might tell us the secret of personal identity as will be discussed in the final chapter.

[84] MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 213.
[85] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 51.
[86] Ibid., p.174.

No real identity exists in us other than what we produce in response to the expectations of others, argues the American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley. We are reactions to others around us or what we imagine they think about us. He famously mentioned that "I am not what I think I am and I am not what you think I am; I am what I think that you think that I am".[87] This sort of an understanding can only be developed with the help of a theory of mind. Mirror tests in children go on to prove that they are concerned about what people think about them. They become self-conscious and conscious of others thinking about them. We are evaluating others' expectation of us and are trying to fit into such conceptual frameworks. So, when we say the child has recognised himself/herself in the mirror, we are declaring the arrival of a self, more precisely a social self. Medical science tells us how children with autism face the difficulty of not being able to read the mind of others and fail to form proper self-concepts.

We have seen in this section how we are forced to read others' mind and how that in turn helps us in forming our own self-concepts. We are motivated, influenced and shaped by the society as far as formation of one's self-concept is concerned. No one is sole author of himself/herself. S/he is bound to history, location and to people around. We are expected to confirm to the demands of the society to be accepted and valued. If the narration goes against these social expectations, one is forced to change; not so often the society is forced to change. This might be the reason that self formation has become a psychological hit and part of popular talk. But mostly, we end up what society or the significant others in our life expect us to become.

2.7. Conclusion

What we have is a rainbow of notions about the self with *minimal self* and *narrative self* broadly marking the two extremes. We tried to understand the minimal self from an experiential dimension as the unextended phenomenological subject of experience and the narrative self from a relational dimension as a temporal and conscious product of the reciprocal relationship with people around.

We will return to greater discussions on the narrative accounts of self in the last chapter, trying to bring some kind of a comprehensive understanding of the notion of self. In the next chapter, what we intend to discuss is the empirical process whereby the whole notion of self

[87] Ibid., p. 51.

is developed; the neurological mechanism involved in the process of owning phenomenological experiences and chaining them into coherent stories to form notions of a subject of such experiences. Our intention of looking at the intricacies of the neuronal network that assist in the formation of self is to understand how the whole process happens. And more than that, while studying in detail about various brain pathologies that become detrimental to the process of self-concept-making, we may try to understand the most significant aspect about ourselves, what makes us what we are, something that is taken for granted with great slackness. The ultimate intention in studying these is to see if we can gain a clue into the unifying process between the various aspects of the self as discussed in the present chapter.

Why is thought, being a secretion of the brain, more wonderful than gravity, a property of matter?

– Charles Darwin.

Chapter Three

Autobiographical Brains: Neurophysiological bases of Self-constitution

Chapter Three

Autobiographical Brains: Neurophysiological bases of Self-constitution

3.1. Introduction

In the previous two chapters we discussed about the ontological, experiential, and relational aspects of self-beings. While looking at the metaphysical nature of the self in the first chapter, we refuted the possibility of disembodied self or disembodied consciousness and discussed how substantialist notions of self had a freefall in the intellectual history and ended up being fractured or hyphenated concepts. In the second chapter, we looked at alternative understandings of self and especially the contemporary discourse on self as a socially constructed notion. We saw how infant organisms develop sense of self from the phenomenological inputs they come to have of the world. We could not be remiss about the significant roles of the biological determinants and the social constraints involved in the largely non-conscious process of constituting a self-concept. In the light of this discussion we did notice how the concept of autobiographical self turns out to be not so autopoetic, something in control of its own affairs, although it sounds well to be one such.

No one might be aware of the most significant process of survival going on in one's own organism for most part of their life, the self process, except for times when individuals make up stories about themselves. But to move away stating it is a non-conscious process would be far too much to be accommodated in any serious attempt to understand the origin and nature of the concept of self. Studies in neuroscience shed ample light on certain bodily processes that might be involved in the process of self constitution, both conscious and non-conscious. In this chapter, we will be discussing the mysterious - irrespective of all that we claim to know about it - role of the brain in the formulation of a self concept.

3.2. Self: Being or having?

The dilemma "being or having a self" well illustrates the philosophical problem of self. The question could be framed this way: "Am I a body or do I have a body?". Affirming the first portion of the question will require us to explain the problem of self-reflexivity, how is pure matter capable of producing immaterial conscious thought outputs, and affirming the second position will open up the Pandora box of dualistic problems.

Why doesn't dualism become a philosophical issue as far as non-human animal species are concerned even though we are in no position to deny phenomenological experiences to at least some of them? Animals are more than just robotic beings and have their own ways of experiencing the world; a piece of bone does not have similar meanings and relevance for a dog and a sheep and every dog will have a different way of relating to its world. It would imply that there are mind functions in the animal world, even though not necessarily conscious. Here we might apply the minimalist accounts of self as discussed in the previous chapter to the non-human species that may have minimalist *awareness* of their own body and preferences, lacking in all presumption the reflective notion of self or the *thick notion of self,* which we believe has evolved in the humans alone. Neuroscientists like Damasio argue that if not for subjectivity in the lower creatures, we would have never become conscious ourselves.

> Had subjectivity not begun, even if very modestly at first, in living creatures far simpler than we are, memory and reasoning are not likely to have expanded in the prodigious way they did, and the evolutionary road for language and the elaborate human version of consciousness now we posses would not have been paved.[1]

Having a first person perspective or subjectivity marks every organism of phenomenological experience on a scale of self-beings. We must, at least, agree that there is some notion of uniqueness and distinction working in the animals, thanks to their memory and preferences. Their being organisms capable of experiencing from a first person perspective, though not necessarily conscious, marks them somewhere nearer to us on a scale of selfness. To be termed a *self-being* by definition, the organism has to be conscious of this "theory of mind" operating in its perceptions and behavior. And that might well keep non-human animal species away to the other side of the line, distinct from human self-beings.

Non-human animals lack this ability to reflect, we assume. But the phenomenological experience that they undergo, facilitated by their subjectivity and unique non-conscious theories of mind cannot be undermined. We might call them minimal selves or proto-selves, organisms with the potency for becoming self-conscious or self-beings, in so far as they experience the world in their own *meaningful* ways. Reflection on such first personal phenomenological experiences causes grains of self-concept and we assume that the animals aren't capable of such reflection in the first place. The positioning of a Cartesian soul or thinking substance becomes irrelevant in cases of mechanical simplicity, assuming that mind-

[1] Damasio, *Self comes to Mind,* p. 4.

processes in non-human animal species do not become conscious events. At the same time, it is here that all the complexities of dualism are brought in, having to place a reflective thinking substance to own human bodies and experiences and to become conscious of them. We do not have answers otherwise. It is for the failure of human brain to describe how it is able to reflect on its own mind functions that it ends up employing a ghost somewhere in its chambers with similar job profile as its own.

We are back at the problem of self-consciousness that places us at higher levels on a scale of evolution among all animal organisms. The problem is: how is self-consciousness made possible? Either we must understand the nature and function of matter and explain how the body is able to reflect on itself and agree that "I am a body" or must appreciate the existence of thinking substances that occupy particular human bodies as suggested in dualist philosophies and agree that "I have a body". The first premise has remained a scientific mystery and the second a philosophical difficulty. There can be but continuity between the two: from the state of *being a body* to being a body that *has the sense* of being a body.

> …[c]ountless creatures for millions of years have had active minds happening in their *brains,* but only after those *brains* developed a protagonist capable of bearing witness did consciousness begin, in the strict sense, and only after those *brains* developed language did it become widely known that minds did exist.[2]

It is precisely for our present failure to understand the nature and functioning of the body/matter that we are possibly given into the troubles of dualism. We do not know how the *something extra* that makes us different is made possible in the brain. Once science tells us clearly about the brain operations that makes self-consciousness possible, the ghost might be fired off its mysterious existence.

To a large part it is being done and many of the portfolios have come off its kitty. Self-function has come to be understood as the brain's way of organizing its world. It's the brain's way of making a chunk of meat feel distinct from the world, providing it with a sense of uniqueness and identity, which it does not possess originally. In turn, this sense of self and distinction provides the organism necessary motivation and methods to guarantee its survival. "Why such individual survivals are necessary in a pool of energy" is altogether a different metaphysical question to be asked at a different level. Hence we conclude that the body may

[2] Ibid., p.17.

not have a self but a self-concept, facilitating its survival. I am a being with a concept of self, a self-being. But the question "how this self-concept comes about in a chunk of flesh?" still lurks at large. We will try to discuss the neurophysiological mechanisms that underlie the process in the final sections of this chapter.

I recognize people around me because I have concepts about them and I infer that they recognize me because they have some notion of me as well. It is this notion about oneself in the others' mind that every self-being tries to make sense of. Even neuroscientists like Ramachndran agrees to this point of view, rather he calls this inferential process an essential ingredient of self-awareness.

> As a corollary to adopting the other's point of view, you can also see yourself as others see you—an essential ingredient of self-awareness. This is seen in common language: when we speak of someone being "self conscious," what we really mean is that she is conscious of someone else being conscious of her.[3]

It may be from the neighborhood of personal identity that we are led home - to the comforts of a self-concept. Personal identity and self-concept must have either arisen simultaneously or one must have precipitated the other,[4] argues Ramachandran. The concept of personal identity, that is, how individuals have distinct concepts about and recognize one other, has a point to tell us about the problem of self-knowledge and its origin. Once the distinction and relation between self-concept and personal identity are made clear, we shall return to the topic of self-reflection and consciousness.

3.3. Personal Identity to Self-concept

Personal identity is the aggregate of necessary and sufficient conditions that makes an individual unique and identifiable across spatial and temporal locations, despite physical and mental modifications. One could be identified as the same person if she is in the same way conscious of the past and future thoughts and actions just as those of the present. So the question we wish to ask in this section is: is not the same criterion applied in matters of self-concept as well? Don't we think of ourselves as being same persons because we are conscious of the past actions and future plans as *ours* and not just historical or temporal events and we can relate all of them from some unifying perspective? Does a concept of

[3] Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, p. 128.
[4] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, p. 124.

enduring self not come about when we recognize ourselves standing in the past and future with the same intensity as in the present?

In discussing about the question of personal identity and self-concept, we may call to mind the famous thought experiment that Daniel Dennett discusses in "Where am I?". Dennett speaks of a situation where his brain is removed off its original position and is preserved safely in a laboratory. The remote communication between the brain and the body is made possible through highly complex radio communication systems. But he unfortunately loses the original body and is given a different one subsequently. He also discovers later that a copy of his brain was constructed for any case of emergency. Both the brains are synched and he could switch to either of them alternatively as he wishes, without any practical difficulty. Now throughout the happening, Dennett is plagued by the intriguing question about where he is: is he in the original body, or in the original brain, or in the duplicate body with either of the brains? He also thinks which would be identified as Dennett if the second brain is fitted into an extra body.

Am I in the brain being looked at by my own eyes or outside the fluid-filled-vat looking at my own brain? This is how Dennett was perplexed about himself. But will a person who knows Dennett be perplexed in similar way as he was? Those who recognize him as Dennett might not bother to think whether his brain is connected to his body directly or technically, until it stops functioning meaningfully. Neither would Dennett be bothered if he wasn't told that his brain was safely preserved elsewhere, or until his brain felt it was not moving in unison with the remaining parts of the body. People recognize him to be where his body is. Even Dennett was feeling that he was outside the glass box, in his body - because he is trained into identifying himself with the ever seen body than the unseen brain. (We don't forget that brain is only a part of his body - of course, a significant part.) Every person is trained to such behavior.

At a later stage when communication is lost between the original brain and the body and Dennett has a different body, the question of personal identity will take a sharper turn. For, it is now not only him but everyone who knew him would be in confusion while identifying the real Dennett. His family and friends would be facing another person's physique and the thoughts and personality of Dennett. Would they go for the body or for the mind? Where is Dennett – in his brain or in the body that the old body has been replaced with? The issue will become rather heavier, once the copy of his brain is placed into another body, making two

Dennetts. Here the thought experiment more or less identifies with the concept of whole brain uploading. How do we identify persons – by their appearance or by their mental life and behaviour?

In creating such a highly improbable situation, Dennett has shown how Neisser's account of self, discussed in chapter two of this work, is highly relevant. Neisser understands different aspects of the self such as ecological, interpersonal, extended, and private as constitutive aspects of the conceptual self. As far as personal identity is concerned, we would be basing our concepts of other persons on their bodily properties, their interpersonal behavior and our judgments about their mental life, and would collate all of them into one.

It is important to see the constituent aspects on which we form concepts about persons for our further discussion on the formation of self-concept or the how of it. The awareness of self as a distinct entity could be an inferential knowledge arising from my notion of personal identity. When I refer to another organism as "he" or "she"– I do not refer to a soul within the organism or to the brain of the organism. To recall the thoughts of Dennett, I do not say *Dennett is where his brain is*, I say *he is where the functioning organism called Dennett is* – no matter his organism is half machine and half flesh – it has to function intentionally and it should be identifiable. If I refer to the other as a unique individual distinct from me, I think that I should, in all likelihood, be one such referred to as well. Here I start thinking about what others be referring to, while addressing *me*.

I come to recognize my whole person as a unique being just as I refer to someone's wholeness while referring to them. This self-reflected answer to the question of personal identity turns out to be my self-concept. Here the organism or the self is made object of its own knowledge and reasoning. With ever widening scientific knowledge that we have on the working of human mind to support, we might dare to make philosophical assertions like, "[T]here is no dichotomy between self-as-object and the self-as-knower; there is rather, a continuity and progression. The self-as-knower is grounded on the self-as-object."[5]

It is on reflective thinking about my own identity - what in me makes me unique and distinct in a society of other humans – that the notion of self comes to be. It becomes a case of intellectual concern when I start reflecting about myself, asking *what am I?*. This particular

[5] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, p. 10.

capability of self-questioning might be what we infer other animals to lack, though they identify each other and members of other species.

Questioning and forming concepts of self in us are fuelled by the realization that others have concepts of us in their minds too. Through self-reflection fueled by the problem of personal identity as applied to oneself, the organism comes to have a concept of self, self-knowledge. To interact meaningfully as a social being, one needs to create a theory of other minds and in order to complete this engagement, one has to have a theory of one's own mind. It is possible that either of the two was set in first and provoked the other or both of them coevolved and enriched each other. This must have resulted in having the reflective self consciousness that set us man apart.[6] We might simplify the idea thus: when it is of another person's identity it is a matter of personal identity and when the question of identity posited to oneself, it sets off a self-concept creating process. If we reframe the question of Dennett "where am I?" into "what am I?" it would point to the origins of self-concept.

Our ways of knowing ourselves are different on many counts too. In case of self knowledge, we are given direct access to our mental life as well, unlike while forming concepts of the other where we have to depend on our judgments of their mental life. With the immediate availability of our mental content as objects of knowledge through what is philosophically called the 'privileged access' our concepts of ourselves may become many-fold vivid and robust. Our memories, beliefs, temperance, future plans all do become part of our self-concept, making it look unified and continuous, unlike concepts of the other. The continuous status report that the brain receives of the relatively permanent internal structures of the body has to be read along with this privileged awareness of one's mental contents.

The significance of looking-inside to know what constitutes one's identity or an internal talk in the formation of self-concept could well be inferred from certain neurological pathologies of self where persons fail to have true sense of self precisely for the anomalies of their brains. In cases like schizophrenia where persons do not have a realistic privileged access or where the immunity to error principle is violated, they tend to lose the true sense of self. They miss a concept of themselves without access to contents of their minds. Here self-concept comes to mean something very personal to the organism. One's mental content should be at the service of the self-concept forming/modifying process to be reflected upon, without which the self-

[6] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, p. 124.

concept would be an impaired one as we would see in the discussion on medical pathologies of the self.

While agreeing that proper self-knowledge is made possible only by the immediate availability of one's mental content as objects of knowledge, we should recognize that we are back at the problem of self reflexibility. We stress that immediate self-knowledge would not be possible without self reflection or reflective consciousness on the contents of one's own mind; it is the brain's reflection on its own functions that gives rise to any notion of self - self-knowledge must be a second order affair.

3.4. Self-reflective Self-beings

It is redundant to state that for the formation of any self-concept one has to be conscious or it will remain an organism with non-conscious self functions. Consciousness and self-notion in humans have to be understood as the largest strategy of the same biological principles and the survival instincts of single cell organisms. Human body is a conglomeration of billions of autopoetic cells connected with the fastest and most efficient communication system of the neurons having their central processing system in the brain. Conscious mind-processes and self-functions have worked to great advantage of the human organism and this development has happened in a continuous process of evolution. Explaining its underlying structure is one of the major tasks that neurobiology of consciousness takes upon itself to understand.

> "…countless creatures for millions of years have had active minds happening in their *brains*, but only after those *brains* developed a protagonist capable of bearing witness did consciousness begin, in the strict sense, and only after those *brains* developed language did it become widely known that minds did exist. The witness is the something extra that reveals the presence of implicit *brain* events we call mental. Understanding how the brain produces that something extra, the protagonist we carry around and call self, or me, or I, is an important goal of the neurobiology of consciousness."[7]

We must assume that this *witness*, the *self* is born when the organism talks to itself – asks itself – "whom does these changes happen to?", forcing the construction or modification of the story of the protagonist, the self-concept. It implies that the human person is not always a conscious self or a being with reflective notions of self. Self sprouts when the being is drenched in a rain of questions - when the organism is able to take to itself the question "what

[7] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind* , p.17.

are you?" or to pose to itself the question "what am I?". Humans gain thick notions of self or full bloomed ideas of what he or she is, when the organism becomes aware of itself as a knowing and experiencing subject – constantly taking questions of its identity from within and without.

But, as we understand, this reflective consciousness is not something that is readily given. It does not happen whenever the organism is awake. Ramachandran argues, "… that you are completely unaware of the vast majority of events going on in your brain. Indeed, most of your actions are carried out by a host of unconscious zombies who exist in peaceful harmony along with you (the "person") inside your body!"[8] The puzzle arises when the organism thinks the experiencing organism to be *itself* and is perplexed by its ability to think so.

Even in activities considered to be genuinely human, the involvement of full blown notions of self is debatable. Necessity of thick notions of self for a person to enjoy a piece of art, or to gain a piece of knowledge, or to decide what kind of action fits best into the situation has been a subject of serious philosophical discourse. There have been arguments that without a self-notion these are not possible. But on greater scrutiny we realize that these happen at the experiential level and do not require much of reflective thinking initially, though a theory of mind, subjectivity, is at function here. These experiences stand good chance as constructive phases to the later development of a self, at the level of reflective thinking. They become the content of one's mind, bringing variations in the physical, emotional, and intellectual states of the organism, forcing it to ruminate, to force the question of the protagonist later on**.**

Even the usage of the personal pronoun 'I' can be learned and used being in a system of language in the Wittgensteinian sense, without really understanding what it really is. But at some phase in life one has to sit down with chin in hand to think what does this 'I' refer to. And at this point of pure reasoning and reflection does the word 'I' gain its truest meaning and one starts questioning the sense of being something distinct from the body. Being awake and aroused and images being formed in sectors of one's brain do not guarantee proper self concepts; irrespective of these, one can still have a compromised self-concept. But one can never have self-concept without wakefulness, arousal, and the formation of images, argues

[8] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 228.

Damasio.[9] Self-consciousness does not happen always but in bouts of introspective reflection. One has to intentionally attempt it and there are various processes involved in it.

It is at the stage of pure reasoning/reflection about itself and its mental content that the organism turns out to be a self-being, a being that is conscious of itself, its existence and capacities. That may be the reason why Descartes was forced into believing that the sure-shot existence was that of the 'thinking substance' - whatever it might be - the being that thinks about itself. He believed it was something other than the extended body. On a second thought we realize that if we become *self*-conscious by thinking about the body and its processes, it should be the body thinking about itself, thanks to the myriads of neuronal communication systems.

The question "if a self is embodied" is equally redundant as "if the self is conscious?". There cannot be consciousness without received qualia or perceived mental content, of which the organism is conscious of, and that is not possible without the agency of a body. It is logically impossible to think of a self that is not conscious and there cannot be a content-less free floating being, conscious of itself, except in religious languages. Pure consciousness though sounds great, does not stand the scrutiny of analysis. What does it become conscious of - its capacity to be conscious? What is *it* if it is disembodied and has no mental content? An idea cannot be conscious of itself but one can be conscious of an idea as one's own.

An embodied being with phenomenological inputs alone could be conscious of its subjectivity and agency. This should be supplemented with whatever complex structures that makes reflective consciousness possible, the probable reason why we are conscious and other animal species aren't.

> Self-awareness is very rare in the animal kingdom; only apes share with us the ability to recognize themselves in a mirror. But even they show no signs of being capable of insight, of introspection, of contemplating their future. Perhaps self-consciousness is an intense form of consciousness, requiring exceptionally large neuron assemblies and sophisticated brains.[10]

Considering the complexity of an organ that the brain is, the general understanding among the neuroscientists is that, it is the mysteries of the brain that we should be looking into for dissolving the problem of self. The kind of complexity that the brain contains can be

[9] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, p. 238.
[10] Greenfield, *Brain Story,* p. 185.

understood from the simple calculation that just 500 neurons all connected together and each of them being either in a state of *on* or *off*, the total number of different patterns that they can produce is 2^{500}, a number that exceeds the estimated total number of atoms in the observable universe. Since we know that there are billions of neurons in the brain, we can imagine why the human brain is considered the most complicated structure known to man, rather, to be more accurate, unknown to man.[11]

Though it is the brain that forms somewhat a stable concept of body even in the face of constant changes, the brain would be useless without its input apparatus, the body. Antonio Damasio speculates that it is the relatively permanent internal structure of the body that gives the much required sense of stability to the notion of self and becomes a rock solid foundation for our idea of ourselves.[12] The question here is how the body becomes *mine*. What is the role of the body with its brain in the formation of rather an abstract self-concept? The body is a major part and source of *my* concept of *me*. It is the *most part of me* and the brain will have its own communication system to know of the world, the remaining part of the body, and itself.

3.5. A Brain that talks to itself

The exclusiveness of the knower and the known in the possibility of knowledge is a position generally considered approvingly. This might be the reason that leads us into believing that there should be a subject, a self, for knowledge and consciousness to be possible. A "what-is-it-like" is thought to be always "what-it-is-like-*for*…". Hence, it would be too radical to argue that there is a oneness existing between the known and the knower and scientifically a difficult position to prove. If this was to be a materialist affair, how would the body know itself? A question we probably inherited from Descartes – how can an extended material body appropriate the property of 'thought', a property of the unextended thinking substance? – comes back to intrigue us.

In the universal pool of matter how does a part of it, a bundle of moving matter held together by physical forces, comes to think that it is just more than matter? We have negated the argument that there is something other than matter occupying it for logical reasons and have argued that the self-being is something more than the atoms that it is constituted of. How

[11] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 7.
[12] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind,* p. 194.

does the organism, composed of billions of individual cells, become a thinking matter and consider itself to be an eternally enduring abstract entity? How do experiences become self-luminous? Is consciousness possible without a subject who becomes conscious?

A major reason for the unrelenting problem of self has rightly been our colossal ignorance of the self-reflexive nature of human mind, for our precise failure to answer the above questions. The difficulty to recognize material body as the subject that becomes conscious of itself has been at the root of the problem of consciousness and self. Once the process of reflective consciousness becomes part of our scientific knowledge and we are able to perceive ourselves to be bundles of moving matter capable of reflective speculation, we might be relieved of the burden of carrying a ghost within us.

Self has been usually understood as the unifying principle of different mental states. But in a materialist account how does the self-being come to have that very personal and intimate concept of what it is? Is it formed just like the organism creates images of the world? We will try to discuss the magnificent system of communication in the brain that makes possible our capacity for reflective thinking.

It has become commonsensical that there is *nothing to be found* somewhere in the human body that we may name 'self'. The human body deserves a relooking from an evolutionary standpoint as to how it has evolved a way of creating images of its imaging centre, its central nervous system, just in similar ways that it does of the world. In simpler terms, "how does it talk to itself"? We might understand the communication system of the body in the light of the Aristotelian concept of the *vegetative soul*. The autonomic nervous system is a control system more along the lines of the organization of a plant, preserving the basic integrity of the living system. It was developed as a system of internal cohesion and control, lately extending its realm of affairs to the immediate world outside the formed matter of their own body. This is well pointed out in Damasio:

> In evolutionary history, organisms must have begun with a concern only for their internal problems and prospects, eventually graduating to a concern for proximal problems and prospects at their boundaries, before advancing to the concern for, and cognitive appreciation of, ever more distal problems or prospects.[13]

[13] Dennett, "Review of Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error*", p. 3.

The later development of a conscious self must have taken place upon the ancient, slow and unconscious foundations of a mechanism meant for the internal sustenance of the organism. Majority of the slow internal processes of the human organism is rather unconscious[14] and comparatively stable considering the dynamic later systems. We might be thinking of a stable *me* inside even at the sight of all apparent changes happening to the body, may be for reasons that these ancient systems might better be able to explain.

The primitive brain must be eagerly looked into for sensory data, without which, the newer brain may be able to create mere hallucinations. If there was no primitive data provider, the newer brain would have had no concepts and no sense; it may simply be proven useless. This primitive part of human brain works as the data bank providing relatively stable foundation to the wonder that we call *humanness*. It is on this rocky ancient foundation of body systems that the newer systems of language, imagination, creativity, religiousness all have risen, and these relatively new systems of the brain might be the reason for our humanness.

The ability of the brain to make us what we are does not come up all of a sudden. The faculties of consciousness and self-knowledge are the outcome of calculated communication and imaging systems in the body. The elaborate network does not click on merely by collecting and relaying data mechanically either of the world or of the referent body. Damasio says that the mere physical activation in the brain, in terms of the neural circuits alone does not cause the emergence of a mind, but the ability to coordinate and produce complex thought patterns.

> Brains can have many intervening steps in the circuits mediating between stimulus and response, and still have no mind, if they do not meet an essential condition: the ability to display images internally and to order those images in a process called thought.[15]

The images of the body and of the world, gathered by the primitive regions of the brain, are used for further computations and mapping in the newer regions of the brain. The ability to present them internally and to order them into thoughts, thanks to brain's ability to abstract and metarepresent, cause mind and self.

If we were to ask as to who orders and displays these images and to whom the images are displayed, again the problem of a self might pop up. In the absence of a director, we can look

[14] Bertelsen, *Free will, Consciousness and Self,* p. 3.
[15] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, p. 89.

at it as an affair of might is right, as an alternative theory. The images themselves fight for representation and the stronger ones succeed to gain prominence and get displayed, thus argues Dennett.[16] Though this might well be happening, we will look at this position elaborately later and see if there is any ordering principle at work here. Now coming to the second part of the question of the audience, he goes on to state clearly that it is not a Cartesian self, but an Aristotelian vegetative soul.

> Who or what is the audience for this 'display' of 'images'? Not a Cartesian ego or self, isolated in some central module--the dread Cartesian Theater--and overburdened with powers and responsibilities, but a self distributed throughout the body, a clear descendant of the Aristotelian vegetative soul.[17]

A self-system that is distributed throughout the body, and the reception and coordination of the images of the world (including the body) initiated and ordained by the nervous system might render an organism a sense of self. The body is a coherent unit, its parts doing their bits and then coming together non-consciously to give rise to the sense of a conscious self. Somewhere in these unending processes of internal communication, we might sense the rise of a protagonist who would narrate to the world what and how she experiences. Protagonistic concepts like self, soul, and mind may all be confusions created by language; conveniently used concepts being taken for real.

How the human brain processes impressions and produces sensations has almost become part of scientific knowledge. But, in consciousness studies, more than the perceptions made possible, we are concerned with the second order awareness of that perception: the knowledge that we have of that knowledge - the reflexive character of consciousness. How do complex meta-thoughts happen? How is brain responsible for consciousness of itself? There may be different parts of the brain dealing with different functions; and we are yet to find the unifier, the director who makes a complete picture of our experiences. If there is none such, then who unifies the varying impressions, giving us meaningful pictures of ourselves? And how is it that the brain questions as to how it knows itself.

We need to fill in the gap existing between being a minimal self, as in the case of other animal species interacting with the environment in a subjective way but not in a self-y way and a full bloomed self-being. Here we have to look at the available scientific knowledge

[16] Dennett, "Review of Antonio R. Damasio", Pp. 3-4.
[17] Ibid., p. 3.

about how sensory inputs are processed in the brain - how the brain gains knowledge about the world and more importantly about the remaining parts of the body as also in the case of non-human animals. Once this information is made available, we can train our guns on to another system of knowledge that might make possible knowledge about the very apparatus of knowledge itself, the brain.

We assume the existence of another communication structure receiving sensory inputs from the brain just as it receives data from the external world and circulating it back for further processing. This might be the mystery behind our becoming self-beings, a being capable of reflecting on and forming concepts of themselves. All that we can now is to speculate on this possibility based on the limited knowledge that we have of the brain.

The basic difference that separates us from the animal kingdom is our ability to create meta-representations of the world. We do not have merely different mental states but also an ability to abstract from those presentations and deliberate on different courses of action, applying them appropriately. All our actions do not take place reflexively; we have a system of deliberating and then deciding upon how to act or react. Man is not often led by the stimuli alone but also by conscious interpretation of the stimuli in the light of past experience and anticipated results. The abilities of abstraction and metarepresenation might be the factors that set us apart - the kind of communication made possible internally and with the world outside, thinking and language.

> Just like the first representation itself, the second one serves to emphasize or highlight certain aspects of the first in order to create tokens that facilitate novel styles of subsequent computation, either for internally juggling symbols sequentially ('thought') or for communicating ideas to others through a one-dimensional sound stream ('language').[18]

The brain had been equipped much earlier, let us say, with the capacity of producing a first order sensory representation. It is from here that the development of a 'new brain' takes place. To exemplify this, we may take the representation of a cat in the brain of a rat. For a rat, the cat is always a rolling furry enemy from which it has to run away reflexively. The reaction might take place presumably at the sight of any such looking being. But as far as we are concerned, the cat is not merely a single representation but a meta-representation that could be applied differently depending on the various situations one is in. We just do not

[18] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, p. 117.

react to the perceived stimulus, we interpret it, abstract it and apply it to even unrelated and previously unknown situations. Let us see how the evolution of a 'new brain' assists us in developing such conscious meta-representations.

> But as the human brain evolved further, there emerged a new brain – a set of nerve connections, to be exact- that was in a sense parasitic on the old one. This second brain creates metarepresentations (representations of representations – a higher order of abstraction) by processing the information from the first brain into manageable chunks that can be used for a wider repertoire of more sophisticated responses, including language and symbolic thought. … In short, the second brain imbues an object with meaning, creating a metarepresentaiton that allows you to be consciously aware of a cat in a way that the rat isn't.[19]

My body experiences the world though its sensory organs. The evolutionarily old primitive system in the brain makes sure that it happens even in the absence of higher systems that interprets what it communicates. A second structure, evolutionarily more recent interprets the world as relevant to me. It makes thinking possible by forming metarepresentations, abstract concepts and images and by juggling with them.[20] The knowledge or judgment produced as a result is circulated back for appropriate response. This might be the simplest and non-technical way to explain the process of thinking in the brain.

Ramachandran assumes that these parts of the brain might also be related to the parts executing language functions. Introspective consciousness probably requires another part of the brain perhaps linked to aspects of language to generate a representation of the earlier sensory representation - a metarepresentation.[21] The evolution of a new version of the brain of course has a survival value, the reason why it has developed the way it has. This helps us in dealing with the world in better and meaningful ways, managing and manipulating the same sensory presentation in different ways, depending on the situations. The metarepresentations that we make also help us in applying this knowledge consciously into unknown situations. Thus, whenever we see a cat we just not only think of it as an enemy of the rat but in manifold ways and yes, this sets us apart from other animals. Probably, the development of a new brain region made us what we are today.

[19] Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, Pp. 246-7.
[20] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, p. 117.
[21] Ibid., p. 118.

One might wonder how scientists could even begin to find the seat of awareness in the cacophony of a hundred billion jabbering neurons. The solution might lie in finding the changes that happen in different parts of the brain when a person slips from one state of consciousness to another. Using functional MRI, cognitive neuroscientists can almost read people's thoughts from the blood flow in their brains. They can tell, for instance, whether a person is thinking about a face or a place.[22] Though we are yet to prove scientifically the existence of complex brain functions in the emergence of consciousness, we have to appreciate our ability to use special brain circuits to create meta-representations, both of sensory and motor representations. If not for such capacities, abilities partly to facilitate language and partly facilitated by language, the evolution of qualia and self would have been seriously impaired, or rather impossible. Understanding this system of creating metarepresentation of the sensory data that the brain receives of the world and of itself is critical in our project of understanding the sense of conscious self that we have come to posses.

Now if we apply the same system of communication to the world within the brain, we might be able to assume how the brain is able to talk to itself. When the western world considered mind to be a product of the brain or identical with it, it was considered to be a sixth organ, internal to the body in some of the Indian schools of thought, which functions like any other sense organ of the body. The brain works as a sense organ for mapping its own functions.

> Images are certainly the source of the *objects-to-be-known* in the conscious mind, whether the objects are out in the world (external to the body) or inside the body (like my painful elbow or the finger you burned inadvertently). Images come in all sensory varieties, not just visual, and they pertain to any *object or action being processed in the brain*, actually present or being recalled, concrete as well as abstract. This covers all patterns originating *outside the brain*, either inside or external to the body. It also covers patterns generated inside the brain as a result of conjunctions of other patterns. Indeed, the brain's ravenous map-making addiction leads it to amp its own workings—once again, talk to itself. The brain's maps of its own doings are probably the main source of abstract images.…[23]

To be noted with considerable admiration here is this marvelous intra communication system in the brain. There is a communication system informing the brain about all that is happening in the body and in its surroundings. What we assume here is that there is also another system

[22] Pinker, "The Brain: The Mystery of Consciousness."
[23] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind,* p. 187.

communicating to the brain more importantly about what is happening within itself, making the content of the brain its object of interpretation and knowledge. There might be a loop system in the brain whereby the first system knows what the second system does just as it knows about the world.

> Sensory neurons respond to information picked up from the environment through our senses. Motor neurons relay information that controls our movement outputs. But it is the third class of neurons that makes up the majority – the interneurons, which connect the input and the output of the brain into an internal network where all the really clever stuff happens. It is this internal network that stores information and performs all the operations that we recognize as higher thought processes.[24]

Damasio presents a similar argument too. It is the brain's mapping of what it does and then getting it as primary data to be processed upon and interpreted might be the reason behind brain knowing itself. It must really be talking to itself, leading us to the false belief that it is some external occupant in the brain that knows all about us.

> Minds emerge when the activity of small circuits is organized across large networks so as to compose momentary patterns. The patterns represent things and events located outside the brain, either in the body or in the external world, but some patterns also represent the brain's own processing of other patterns. The term *map* applies to all those representational patterns, some of which are coarse, while others are very refined, some concrete, others abstract. In brief, the brain maps the world around it and maps its own doings. Those maps are experienced as *images* in our minds, and the term *image* refers not just to the visual kind but to images of any sense origin such as auditory, visceral, tactile, and so forth.[25]

This feedback loop system between the primary sensory regions, where we get information about the world through, and the higher visual centres where information is processed and possibly stored, is one to be looked with interestingly. The primary sensory areas get information from the higher interpretative regions of the brain just as they get information from the world outside. This can be argued from the case of persons with visual handicaps. In such cases, the images from memory come into the primary visual areas and are taken for real, thus accounting for hallucinations. It happens usually in older people who have lost their vision due to old age related problems.

[24] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 4.
[25] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, p. 18.

This is also true about the cases of imagination. In cases where one is imagining about a cat, "…there is a dynamic interplay between the brain's so called early visual areas and the higher visual centres, culminating in a sort of virtual reality simulation of the cat."[26] Ramachandran also addresses the next logical question. Why don't we, while imagining, hallucinate the imagined to be true or "confuse our internally generated images with real objects"[27], to borrow his own phrase? The explanation that he gives sounds logical.

There is a difference between people with normal vision closing their eyes and recalling images and people who are blind owing to damage to their visual pathways. Ramachandran argues that when the eyes are closed, some kind of signal is given to the higher visual centres that there is nothing real outside the retina and hence the sense that it is an imagination. But he reasons that when the visual pathways are damaged, the baseline signal is removed and you tend to take the imagined object to be real.[28] We may speculate the secret to our taking dreams to be real lies somewhere here. Bodily reaction to an imagined calamity in the dream and real life calamity is initially the same, unless we come to the realization of having dreamt. It must be due to the limited snapping of this balancing intercommunication system in the brain during sleep that sets us free from the world of reality and allows us to take any number of dreamy incarnations.

Thus, what we argue is that there is an internal communication system that gets to know the internal workings of the brain just as the brain has a way of knowing the workings of the world outside. The feedback about the working of the brain is relayed back to the brain just as neurons communicate information to the brain about the outside world, enabling the brain to process information about itself as thought it was any other object in the world. And the process keeps on. This might be the reason behind our ability to think reflectively, the secret behind reflective consciousness and the mystery behind why we are what we are.

It becomes clear that we are for the brain's ability to talk to itself. We are probably somewhere in the brain, at least, we are where our brains are. Looking back at the thought experiment of Dennett, we assume that the self should be where the brain is, if by self we mean self-concepts. Though Dennett's is a speculative situation and currently not plausible, we can nonetheless presume that it is in the brain that I have the idea that *I am* and of *what I*

[26] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 110.
[27] Ibid., Pp. 110-11.
[28] Ibid. p. 111.

am. Let us look at the physiological relation between the brain (body) and its sense of being a self-being.

3.6. *I* am where my Brain is: Brain and Self-concepts

Going back to Dennett's experiment let us look at the situation where the communication system between Dennett's brain and the remaining part of his body in the ditch has been snapped. Assuming that the brain remains safely functional in its vat, what do we have now - a dead body and a living brain? The body would not be Dennett, but a dead body, and the brain might still have a sense of being Dennett. So if the brain is preserved of all its functions without a body, can there still be a self-being? Though Dennett's body disconnected from his brain is no more Dennett, yet his brain disconnected from the body but functioning properly would carry within it a sense of being Dennett.

But we should be cautious in saying that *we* could be safely preserved in our brains without a primary, bodily input system. The self-concept in the brain would remain imperfect without a body and it would be limited to its memories and the internal abstract reasoning that could be made possible based on the conceptual data that the brain could amass before its connection with the remaining body was snapped. I need my body along with to identify me to be me. The brain has a sense of my body, my history, my thoughts and beliefs but I am the referent of all these too. My brain is so much connected to my body that even a missing limb continues to torture it at times.[29] To a large extent, the reach of one's self would be restricted, devoid of any new sensation coming in and the brain would subsequently start having either hallucinations[30] or it would decide itself to be dead.[31]

At each moment the state of self is constructed, from the ground up. It is an evanescent reference state, so continuously and consistently *re*constructed that the owner never knows it is being *re*made unless something goes wrong with the remaking.[32] The process of registering events, image formation, the origin of an autobiographical self and the correlating neuronal changes in the brain are all areas of serious enquiry in neuroscience and neurobiology. We focus so much on the brain as the battle ground of self-constitution for commonsensical reasons as well; if ever a brain transplant were possible, even though the patient might look

[29] Ibid., Pp. 22-23.
[30] Ibid., Pp. 109-12.
[31] Ibid., Pp. 167 & 248.
[32] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, p. 240.

the same as they come out of the anesthetic, most of us believe that they would be someone different – more like the person who donated their brain in the first place.[33]

The thought experiment of Dennett tries in theory to argue that *one is* where *his brain is* as Dennett with his functioning brain and a new body remains to be himself. And possibly he could also be in a perfect copy of his brain; a prosthetic organ should not make you any lesser than what you are, provided your memories and other mental contents and processes are preserved intact. Thought experiments are necessary for explaining things that would otherwise be inexplicit in normal situations. But can we present any scientific proof for the claim that *I am, if my brain is* and jump into the realm of science to find out the significance of the brain in the formation of a healthy self-being?

With better access into the hitherto mysterious chambers of the brain with the assistance of advanced technology, we know that it is the brain as a unified system that generates rich, multidimensional experiences by integrating information from diverse brain regions. Our conscious self comes somehow out of this richness and without such cortical activity, we lose consciousness - we lose our self.[34] Inputs regarding this are given to us from research on the pathologies of self; and speculations in science have the added advantage of being empirically informed. Thus, it remains to be seen as to what extent of an explanation could be provided by men of empirical sciences to the role of fully functioning brains in the formation of proper self concepts. There are certain pathologies wherein damage to particular areas or parts of the brain cause people to lose their true sense of self. Also there are cases, wherein persons are not able to build pictures of their life due to brain anomalies. All such cases go on to prove that the proper functioning of brain is a prerequisite for the development and sustenance of healthy personhood.

The five aspects of self that Ulric Neisser talks about seem to be comprehensive as far as the concept of self is concerned and we look at each of these aspects and see how an anomalous brain affects each of them. The ecological self, interpersonal self, extended self, private self, and conceptual self could all be impaired separately in cases of brain anomalies, guiding us to the knowledge that it is for a meaningfully functioning brain that *we are*. Here we will be dealing with a few such psychological and neurological disorders that might take us a long way in understanding what we really need to be self-conscious - exactly what parts of the

[33] Hood, *The self illusion*, p. x.
[34] Ibid., Pp. 9-10.

brain are engaged in producing true conscious experiences. It may be difficult to understand what causes consciousness and self-concepts, but it may be easier to know what causes their absence.

3.6.1. Pathologies of the Material self

The basic constituent of self- concept should be awareness of one's body. Antonio Damasio would take the sense of embodiment to such heights to argue that it is the awareness of the relatively permanent nature of the internal body structure that prompts one to believe in self permanency.[35] Awareness about the body, what belongs to one, and one's boundaries is a logical necessity to frame a sense of individuality. And this is made meaningful by the human body's consistent interaction with the phenomenological world. The brain has a sense of not only the world outside but a better and internal awareness of the body, of which it is a part. Certain anomalies of the brain but destroys this very sense of embodiment in the person: they either refuse to acknowledge certain parts of their body or they fail to realize that they really miss certain parts of their body.

Damage to the right parietal lobe in the brain produces a strange sickness called Hemi-neglect, wherein the patient loses care of the left side of her body.[36] She just fails to scan and be aware of a side of the world – it just does not exist for her. She is blind to the events on this particular side unless someone else draws her attention consciously to events there, which she has no trouble seeing then. She becomes a lesser being as far as the reach of her embodiment is concerned. In certain cases of schizophrenia also the patients may feel that his body is a mere thing and experience an extreme sense of separation between mind and body, or even feel amazement at being a body at all.[37]

In another disorder of the body called Anosognosia, an extreme form of neglect, the patient with a paralyzed left arm caused by right hemisphere damage will deny her paralysis. A patient with such an ailment might think and *sincerely believe* that the paralyzed side of her body is absolutely fine and functions as though there was nothing wrong about it. This results from right hemisphere lesions in the brain.[38] In yet another bizarre syndrome called Anton's

[35] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, p. 194.
[36] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 114.
[37] Parnas and Sass, "Self-consciousness in Schizophrenia", p. 534.
[38] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, Pp. 41-42,121; Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, p. 258. But in cases where the right side of the body is paralysed with damage in the right hemisphere the patient never

syndrome, a patient who is blind owing to cortical damage denies that she is blind.[39] It is seen here how the brain itself is involved in damage control operations and try to fix bodily awareness to the normal concept that one has of the body. The process of denial is so strong here that the very ownership of the damaged parts of the body is meddled with. In some cases, the patient may even claim that the paralyzed organs of the body belong to someone else.[40] We will come back to this in the final chapter when discussing how various defense mechanisms are employed in making one's sense of self coherent and fitting with the self-concept that one holds on to so dearly.

Individuals can also have strange experiences of things that they really do not have, as in the case of phantom limbs. Limbs long amputated from the body cause impressions and sensations in the human brain in such bizarre situations. This has been justified with an explanation of cross wiring into different locations in the brain that process information from various sense organs. Here the absence of sensation from a particular region of the brain is overtaken by impressions from nearby regions and are mimicked for real.[41] It shows how the clear sensory pathways in the brain and their structure as related to the whole body and help produce sense of embodiment. In these cases, the individual loses a realistic understanding of his own physical nature and the brain or the body itself alters to give a comprehensive understanding of the body and its surroundings. Since the sense of self is formed from the relatively permanent nature of the bodily being, these brain impairments can have serious implications for the concept of self. The person is forced either to deny a part of the body that very much belongs to her or own a part of the body that no longer is. More importantly, we realize that these states that the patients are in have strong neurological underpinnings; they just do not make up stories consciously.

3.6.2. Pathologies of the Interpersonal Self

Individual persons are partly a reflection of others in the world as self formation is also influenced significantly by the expectations and constraints of the society. Any sense of self is triggered from the presence of otherness that one has to deal with in the external world. The illusion of the reflected self we experience is constructed by those around us through our

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experiences denial. It is assumed from this that the denial role is of the left hemisphere. (Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 132.)

[39] Crick, *The astonishing Hypothesis*, p. 271.

[40] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the brain*, Pp. 131-33.

[41] Ibid., Pp. 29-31, 37.

social interactions during the formative years.[42] In the process of watching others and trying to understand them, we not only do we learn from others about the world around us, but we also learn to become self-beings, discovering who we are. But this ability to meaningfully interact with the world and also to frame sensible self-concepts can be seriously damaged in different cases of brain anomalies.

Humans and other social primates come with inborn brain circuitries that help them to distinguish between and recognize different individuals in the society irrespective of the similarities they posses. The human expertise to recognize thousands of separate faces is supported by neuronal circuitry in a region known as the *fusiform gyrus*, a cortical region located just behind the ears, which becomes active when one looks at faces. If one is unfortunate to have damaged this area (especially on the left side), then she may suffer from a condition known as Prosopagnosia, a kind of face blindness. Prosopagnosics can no longer tell faces apart and fail to recognize those that were once very familiar.[43] Or in another case called Fregoli, the person keeps seeing everywhere similar faces of his dear ones. Here she not only fails to recognize faces but interprets every face to be that of a person related much emotionally to her.[44] If one was due to lack of emotional attachment, the other is just the opposite. In a different take of it, the significance of the coordinated functioning of the emotional centres of the brain in recognizing persons and making meaningful social existence is attempted an explanation by Ramachandran.

In the bizarre case of Capgras Syndrome, persons lack emotions attached to the sensory inputs of vision and therefore fail to make any personalization on seeing someone dear. They fail to recognize faces of people who are very close to them and are incapable of having meaningful social existence. In normal vision, information from the visual areas of the brain, *Fusiform Gyrus* (that deals with discriminating information) is relayed after interpreting the sensation via *pathway 3* to the *amygdala*, the emotional centre of the brain, which performs an emotional surveillance.[45] It is this way that we get emotionally attached to people we see and become consciously aware of their relatedness to us. Capgras Syndrome is supposedly caused by damage to this particular pathway from vision to emotion. This fact helps us in understanding the importance of emotion and the relation between different parts of the brain

[42] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 26.
[43] Ibid., p. 27.
[44] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, Pp. 170-71 and Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, p. 278.
[45] Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, p. 69.

in the emergence of conscious awareness of the social world that we are set in. Persons with no emotional content perceive the world as though they were cameras, making no significant meaning to their world.

Going a step further, there could also be challenges in recognizing even oneself due to abnormal neuronal conditions. Patients with Capgras Syndrome can have a problem with their own self. The patient may fail to recognize himself in the mirror or photograph and say it is another person just like him or it is another Arthur, for example.[46] In "mirror misidentification" disorder, the patients think their own reflection does not belong to them. They appreciate the likeness, but there is no self-recognition. Some failure in the face processing circuitry of the brain somehow results in their not being able to register their own outward identity.[47] We remember our argument here that self-concept is an extension of personal identity; it is the rules of personal identity applied to oneself. The foundational neural structures are the same.

It is not only in recognizing persons but also in making meaningful relations with them that one develops meaningful self-concepts and becomes a social being. One has to have a somewhat clear understanding of other minds to relate intentionally and also to have a meaningful understanding of the self. Infantile autism is a serious sickness affecting the development of interpersonal self.[48] Affected persons show total lack of interest in other people and in initiating and maintaining relationships with them. Autistic children might come with a damaged mechanisms that otherwise enables persons to relate to members of their tribe.[49] They might also confuse the pronouns "me" and "you" in conversation. There is poor differentiation of ego boundaries and a failure of the self-other distinction.[50] It can be imagined why individuals with autism find direct social interaction frightening. If one cannot figure out other people and their intentions, social encounters must be intensely baffling.[51]

The pathologies of interpersonal self affect one's self-concept considerably. Persons end up living in a secluded world, where no others will have an entry into. Without the capacity to read others and integrate socially, someone with severe autism is going to have a very

[46] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 172.
[47] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 52.
[48] Ramachandran, "Broken Mirrors: A Theory of Autism", Pp. 62-69.
[49] Neisser, "Five kinds of Self-knowledge," p. 394.
[50] Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, p. 263.
[51] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 66.

different sense of self that does not include those around them.[52] Ramachandran argues this could also be due to the damage of mirror neurons, which help us establish relation with other members of the tribe in an emotionally involved way,[53] and associated frontal inhibitory circuitry.[54] In comparison to other animals, humans spend the greatest amount of time in childhood, and it is not only for us to learn from others, but also for learning to become like others. Becoming like others and getting on with them involves creating sense of who we are – as participating members of the human species.[55] This ability of discovering who we are in relation to the other gets compromised significantly in brain anomalies such as those discussed above.

3.6.3. Pathologies of the Extended Self

In the words of Neisser, the extended self is the self that was in the past and that is expected to be in the future, known primarily on the basis of memory. It is in subjectively colored memories of the past that one extends existence from the present. "In remembering something that I did or experienced on some other occasion—by remembering *that* I did it rather than merely how to do it—I necessarily became aware that my existence transcends the present moment,"[56] he says. But one's understanding that one exists outside the present moment gets impaired seriously in various brain pathologies, mostly in different cases of memory loss.

One is what one remembers one was and what one plans to be. There cannot be real pictures of the self without history as autobiographical selves are constructed of and embedded in memories and imagined anticipations. This extended nature of self gets seriously impaired in various cases of amnesia caused by brain anomalies like Alzheimer's etc. In the eyes of a patient who fails to recall who he is, or what his personal and social life had been, one would see but pure blankness. "In cases of amnesia, there is a considerable disruption of the unique memories that correspond to one's past and one's plans for the future."[57] The patient just fails to exist. He might be a minimal self, not a temporary self. The historicity and temporality of the patient gets seriously damaged.

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[52] Ibid., p. 67.
[53] Ramachandran, "Broken Mirrors: A Theory of Autism", Pp. 62-69.
[54] Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, p. 263.
[55] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. xii.
[56] Neisser, "Five kinds of Self-knowledge," Pp. 395-96.
[57] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, p. 237.

It is not only in failures to remember the past that self fails to be, but in failures to create new memories as well.

> We know that the hippocampus is required for acquiring and consolidating new memory traces. If you lost the hippocampi ten years ago, then you will not have any memories of events that occurred after that date. You are still fully conscious, of course, because you have all the memories prior to that loss, but in a very real sense your existence was frozen at that time.[58]

The ability of self narration in individuals with damage to both the hippocampal-entorhinal regions is compromised as they are unable to form new memories; they get frozen at the point of losing this ability.[59] In the classical case of David,[60] who had to face the tragedy of memory loss, it becomes evident. Damasio claims that he behaves perfectly as if he is a minimal self and responds to the moment meaningfully but his existence does not get extended. He fails to make a narration of his existence – he fails to extend his story beyond the present moment.

This is seen in Korsakoff's syndrome as well - another case of profound amnesia, where the patient is unable to remember for more than a second or two. This results in his living in an eternal present and being unable to generate a stable sense of self. He has to literally make up himself and his world every moment that he is awake,[61] something that happens so unconsciously and effortlessly in persons with normal brain functioning. The situation would be something like:

> It was as if every waking moment was the first waking moment. Clive was under the constant impression that he had just emerged from unconsciousness because he had no evidence in his own mind of ever being awake before… 'haven't heard anything, seen anything, touched anything, smelled anything', he would say. 'it's like being dead.'[62]

Other than in cases of memory loss where the patient fails to commit episodes of his life into memory and extend his existence into the past and future, in some cases of neuronal anomaly patients can lack the ability to meaningfully make a narration of the different episodes. In some cases like Dysexecutive Syndrome, the person literally misses the thread to make a

[58] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 250.
[59] Damasio, *Self Comes to mind*, p. 237-8.
[60] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, Pp. 115-18.
[61] Bruce Hood, *The Self Illusion*, Pp. 168-69.
[62] Wearing, *Forever Today: A Memoir of Love and Amnesia*, Pp. 157-158.

coherent narration of his/her. Meaningful extension of the self gets impaired. The patient fails to make associations between two things even though they are related to each other in a very strong relation. What indicates breakdown in the unity and extension of consciousness is that these patients are unable to consider two things together, even things directly related to one another. For example, people with this disability are not able to create continuity of experience such as relating different episodes of meeting the same person; they cannot draw a link between the three different occasions of meeting the same person. For them the three occasions may be true but of meeting three different persons.[63] There may not be any coherence but occurrence of separate incidents.

John Locke had emphasized that for the construction of unique personal identity the conscious awareness of one's own history was significant. In the cases of memory loss and memory forming disabilities, we see this awareness is lost, resulting in strange behaviors. Locke was possibly referring to the significance of autobiographical memories in the creation of one's stable personal identity. Pathologies affecting memory such as those discussed above make clear the significant role that brain and neuronal functions play in creating sense of stable and enduring sense of self.

3.6.4. Pathologies of the Private Self

While referring to oneself as an object, one would in all probability be referring to the conscious mental life that one holds closely to the core of his person. They are simply unavailable to anyone else; many of them being too private. One's thoughts, feelings, desires, and beliefs are what one immediately thinks oneself to be on serious self pondering. This method of understanding oneself as one's private world is amply demonstrated in Hume's attempt to get hold of a self. What he ended up witnessing was what Neisser would call features of the private self.

Contents of the private self is not all immune from distortions and decay – they can be manipulated too. In an attempt to form a coherent and acceptable narration of the self, one may delete or overemphasize certain feelings or emotions and this mostly works to the benefit of the individual narrator. Psychological phenomena like obsessive thinking, repression, denial of feelings, etc. we will discuss while dealing with the narrative process of self creation in the next chapter. Though they distort the true nature of oneself, we do not

[63] Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, Pp. 277-78.

consider them here for the reason that defense mechanisms might be needed in constructing coherent self narratives and need not be considered pathological always.

But the very personal self that an organism is expected to have or develop can go all the wrong way to distortion and even multiplication, ultimately resulting in the ownership of the same body by different personalities and affecting proper unified self-fuinctions. This defies the very notion of self as a numerically singular entity. Such situations normally arise when the unity of one's private self can no longer be held in peace due to the mutually contradictory beliefs and perceptions. "… [i]f you have two sets of mutually incompatible beliefs and memories about yourself, the only way to prevent anarchy and endless strife may be to create two personalities within one body—the so-called multiple personality disorder."[64]

In the case of Dissociative Identity Disorder, which is more commonly known as Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), there seems to exist a split of consciousness in patients. There may be two or more personalities inhabiting the same body, unknown to each other. They take turns in 'living' while the rest remain dormant.[65] They have complete amnesia or loss of memory regarding episodic appearance of the other personalities. Though the exact physiological roots of the case is not yet known, the role of the brain in providing us a sense of unified self and in making our very being-ness possible can be inferred from such strange cases. The different stories that one threads, often the story of what one thinks one is and the others as to what one desperately wants to be, become so vivid that each of them takes control of the whole affair, unlike in normal cases where the minor stories get integrated more or less successfully into the main story.

Though the exact nature of MPD is unknown, sometimes the dissociation in Dissociative Identity Disorder is behaviorally as complete as it is in brain bisection patients in the lab.[66] After severing the two portions of the brain by removing *Corpus Colossum,* a large strand of about 200,000,000 neurons running from one hemisphere to the other, a strange thing occurs. The unity of consciousness ceases to be and the person starts showing symptoms of dual personalities, or as two centres of unified consciousness.[67] In severe cases, the same body starts behaving as though it were two different persons having two different natures and

[64] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 251.
[65] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind,* p. 123.
[66] Brook and Raymont, "The Unity of Consciousness," *SEP*.
[67] Ibid.

temperaments. In certain cases the right side of the body and the left side of the body get engaged in seemingly contradictory behaviours.[68] This also goes to show the importance of having a unified brain functioning to have unified conscious experiences and for the constitution of healthy self concepts.

Self-illusion is really the culmination of a multitude of processes, split-brain studies reveal. These usually work together in synchrony to produce a unified self but when inconsistencies arise, the system, strongly influenced by language, works to re-establish coherence.[69] The private self that we hold on dearly may be a result of complex synchronization that the brain undertakes. The resulting concept of a unified single self might not be accidental but output of a well structured and highly complex communication of neural network, assisted with language and narration skills.

3.6.5. Pathologies of the Conceptual Self

Different aspects of the self that Neisser talks about contribute towards the formation of a wholesome self-concept. Notions about our material body, persons around us, our memories and plans, our thoughts and feelings all go well into creating a sense of self that we think "we are". Hence any going awry at any stage of this concept formation can adversely affect the process. But there are certain anomalies that affect our very concept of self, and individuals end up having distorted images of self or fail to have any. In cases where they fail to have metarepresentations or to facilitate internal talks, strange behaviours occur.

If self-concept is all about self-reflexivity and one's understanding of what one is, then schizophrenia would be the typical pathology of self. Schizophrenia probably affects the very process of self-concept making. Schizophrenic patients seem to miss a point that gives them realization of what is happening within. They fail to listen to the inner commands that they themselves produce. This speaks of their apparent inability to have reflexive thoughts or lack of transparency regarding their inner world.

It seems that in cases of schizophrenia, the patients lose transparency of conscious experience. They imagine themselves to be someone else and lose track of themselves giving rise to such imagination that they end up believing they are what they believe. Patients with

[68] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 12; Kolak and Martin, (eds.), *Self and Identity,* p. 8.
[69] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 170.

schizophrenia take imagination for real.[70] They might secretly consider themselves to be time-travelers or extra-terrestrials.[71] The self monitoring process of schizophrenic patients is believed to be disrupted and they attribute sensations and experiences generated by their own brains and bodies as coming from elsewhere.[72] The probability of them enjoying tickling themselves is very high for the same reason. In some particularly severe forms of schizophrenia, the victim seems to lose the ability to have an integrated, interrelated experience of his or her world and self altogether.[73] This has to be seen in the light of our argument that it is because of a brain that talks to itself that we are self-conscious and have a sense of being distinct from the body. Without this reflective information feedback system, we would remain mere subjects or knowers, never self-conscious beings.

Unlike in the case of schizophrenic patients, there is a situation called Cotard's Syndrome, where the patients claim that they do not exist at all. We saw earlier that patients with Capgras syndrome may fail to accept and appreciate persons who are otherwise emotionally closer to them like their father or mother. It is for the reason that their appearance does not cause any emotional impact in the patient's mind. If emotion is detached only from the faculty of vision in Capgras syndrome, we find total absence of emotions towards all sensations in Cotard's Syndrome. It might be due to damage to all pathways to the emotional centres in the brain. In this case, all or most sensory pathways to the *Amygdala* are totally severed. They do not feel anything even after having proper impressions interpreted by the brain. Ultimately they reach the conclusion that they might be dead as they do not feel they are alive in a dynamic world.[74] Let us assume that in such cases the phenomenological experiences of the individual fails in leading him/her to concept formation or they lack that personalizing effect, what is philosophically called subjectivity. It shows the significance of the body-mechanism for phenomenally engaging the world for the creation of a sense of self. If the world causes changes in the organism it will consider itself to be different from the world, to be the provoked subjects of the external world's stimulus. And will thus begin to objectify itself as something different from the world. This, otherwise normal, self-making process does not happen in case of Cotard's Syndrome where the organism is incapable of being changed by the phenomenological world.

[70] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, Pp. 110-11.
[71] Josef Parnas and Louis Sass, "Self-consciousness in Schizophrenia", p. 534.
[72] Blackmore, et.al. "Why can't you tickle yourself?", Pp. R11-16.
[73] Brook and Raymont, "The Unity of Consciousness", *SEP*.
[74] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, Pp. 106-07.

Another serious situation where the individual might lose a sense of self is in epileptic seizures. Epilepsy has been understood as having a purely physical base. An amazing thing about epilepsy is that the conscious awareness returns a while after the person has lost sense of himself and of the world around. During the seizures, galvanic skin responses do not report any emotions and the affected takes the world for unreal. The patient may fall into depersonalization or derealisation. Ramachandran has noted another interesting factor about epilepsy. As the emotional pathway 3 (as well as links from pathway 2 to Amygdala) of the patient is strengthened in epilepsy, the patient may claim that all people seem to resemble a prototype person he knows,[75] which means the person has difficulty with identifying other persons. Here his interpersonal self is also compromised.

We have discussed a few bizarre situations and have seen how neuronal deficiencies or anomalies can seriously affect our self-making process or our very self-concepts. These disorders go to show how certain parts of the brain, the correct neural communications and the chemical reactions in the brain help us function as unified self-beings. Two conclusions that can be arrived at from discussions on different pathologies of self are: one, the self is highly delicate and fragile; and two, self is because of the brain.

A minute damage to certain areas of the brain is all that is required for us to lose the most mysterious and luminous faculty that we have, the very sense of being self-beings. And ends with it all our human life, its creativity, spiritual nature, or consciousness. Self-concept or the self making process that we take for granted is but a game of tight rope walking – a serious and delicate affair that we never take note of unless something goes wrong. "If brain disorders and stressful life events can distort the personal experience of self such that an individual does not feel that they are really themselves anymore, then these episodes reveal the fragility of the self in the first place",[76] argues Bruce Hood. Another conclusion that we can reach at is about the significance of certain brain areas and structures in the self-concept making process. If there is something so special happening when the brain is integrated in the proper way, there should also be something not happening when this integrated communication system breaks down. The lesions in minute areas of the brain can cause serious troubles to our normal conscious experience of the world and of ourselves, as seen in unfortunate cases where persons fail to be self-beings due to neurological anomalies of the brain. Thus, it clearly shows how one has to look into the brain more than anywhere else for

[75] Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, p. 278.
[76] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 53.

the reasons as to why we are what we are – why we have a sense of self and why some unfortunate ones do not.

We have seen that certain structures or parts of the brain are more involved in the process of self-creation and sustenance than the others. But, can we pin-point particular areas or regions in the brain that are directly responsible for the formation of self? Can we really localize the self?

3.7. Where am *I* in the brain? - Naturalizing or Nihilating the Self?

While discussing about various pathologies of self we saw how damage to certain parts of the brain can have serious repercussions for the formation and maintenance of the concept of a stable self. We see in the works of the neuroscientists that a few evolutionarily recent brain regions are more involved in the whole process of self- making than others. If so, our next question would be - can we pinpoint those areas that are involved in the creation of self concepts in the brain? Can *I* be located somewhere in the chambers of the human brain? It is assumed that our brain, a piece of which in the size of a grain contains one hundred thousand neurons, two million axons and one billion synapses all 'talking to' each other,[77] could naturally be expected to give us answers to an equally complex and mysterious faculty as self-consciousness. But locating self or consciousness in the brain still remains a serious problem. There is difficulty with accepting the 'all' or 'nothing' views of locating consciousness in the brain.

There are scientists who believe that there are specific modules in the brain meant for performing stipulated functions of mind, like language or arithmetic; "…they argue, these modules or regions are largely autonomous. Each does its own job, set of computations, or whatever, and then - like a bucket brigade - passes its output to the next module in line, not "talking" much to the other regions".[78] Studies in persons with selected vision disorders, give proofs for the same.[79] But there is generally strong opposition to looking for the seat of consciousness somewhere in the deep chambers of the brain as well. "…[w]hat makes an

[77] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain,* p. 8.
[78] Ibid., p. 10.
[79] Ramachandran presents a case study where the patient is able to react spatially to objects but fails to interpret what it is. The patient can still make sense of colour and texture but not the form. From this background he claims, "… the highly selective deficits and preserved abilities of Diane give us additional clues that exquisitely specialized regions of this sort do indeed exist in the human brain". (Ibid., Pp. 79-80.)

experience real for someone is not a question that can be answered by peering into the cerebral cortex, any more than what 'explains' an Olympic record-breaking performance can be answered by inspecting the anatomy of the athlete's muscles",[80] the opponents argue.

The connectionists are of the opinion that there aren't any assigned regions in the brain for any particular task but it's a kind of 'holism'. They argue:

> …that the brain functions as a whole and that any part is as good as any other part. The holistic view is defended by the fact that many areas, especially cortical regions, can be recruited for multiple tasks. Everything is connected to everything else, say the holists, and so the search for distinct modules is a waste of time.[81]

The debate between holism and modularism is large. The process can be looked at more openly and one can conclude that "depending on the precise nature of the questions being asked, there seems to be overwhelming evidence that the self is both everywhere and nowhere in the brain."[82] The problem might lie in thinking that consciousness could be traced to any particular part of the brain or conversely that mind has nothing to do with the physiology of the brain. It is true that certain areas of the brain can be pinpointed as involved more in the process than the others. This problem has been clearly explained through an analogy of a game of football.

> The mistake of those who insist on a location for the mind is on a par with supposing that it ought to be possible to find the exact place on (or off) the football pitch where the match was won. The mistake of those who deny that the mind has any location is on a par with supposing that winning the match had nothing to do with what happened on the pitch at all.[83]

It is for sure that the brain has better roles to play in case of consciousness than the other organs in the body like spleens, livers or the legs. Ramachandran would narrow down the scope of inquiry even further and suggest that it is not from the whole brain but from certain specialized brain circuits that carry out a particular style of computation that consciousness arises. After examining many psychological and neurological pathologies that affect the emergence of consciousness and self, he even goes on to claim that vivid subjective quality of consciousness is caused mainly in parts of the temporal lobes (such as *amygdala*, *septum*,

[80] Harris, *Mindboggling,* p. 99.
[81] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 10.
[82] Gallagher, "Introduction: A Diversity of selves", p. 4.
[83] Roy, *Mindboggling,* p. 65.

hypothalamus and *insular cortex*) and a single projection zone in the frontal lobes – the *cingulated gyrus*.[84] But this is not exact pinpointing but merely noting the parts that are more important than others.

This position can be made clear if we understand the evolutionary history of the human brain. While the primitive brain regions are involved more in the autonomous and unconscious activities of the body, the evolutionarily recent regions are involved more in the workings of the higher aspects of humanness. There are clear proofs that many of the acts that we perform are unconscious, let us say, like some other unconscious animals. Spectacular cases of zombie behavior can occur in sleepwalkers and in patients with complex partial seizures. Both involve complex yet relatively stereotypical motor patterns: wandering around, moving furniture and even driving cars.[85] But there are more subtle and complex conscious behaviors that we execute. Now in some states, if we can, like the other primates, function unconsciously, there should be something different in us that produce stranger implications to our lives than what we share with other primates.

There seems to be a link between stages of mere motor activity and the later development of brain as a necessary condition for the emergence of consciously deliberated functioning. It may not be all of a genetic evolution but more of a fast paced cultural transition as suggested by Ramachandran. He calculates that about a hundred and fifty thousand years ago there was a revolutionary development of certain key structures and functions of the brain, the fortuitous combinations of which resulted in the mental abilities that make us special.

> We went through a *mental* phase transition. All the same old parts were there, but they started working together in new ways that were far more than the sum of their parts. This transition brought us things like full-fledged human language, artistic and religious sensibilities, and consciousness and self awareness. Within the space of perhaps thirty thousand years we began to build our own shelters, stitch hides and furs into garments, create shell jewelry and rock paintings, and carve flutes out of bones. We were more or less finished with genetic evolution, but had embarked on a much (much!) faster-paced form of evolution that acted not on genes but on culture.[86]

[84] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 228.
[85] Koch and Crick, "On the zombie within".
[86] Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, p. 13.

Francis Crick is an equally strong proponent of the evolution of human brain by natural selection over many generations of animals.[87] There are also philosophers like Greenfield, who claim the difference from the other animal species to be a handiwork of the brain and its sophisticated and complex network that evolved in the course of time. He states how rarely self-awareness could be found in the animal kingdom; only the apes have the ability to recognize themselves in the mirror. But even they do not exhibit any signs of insight or introspection. Neither do they have the sufficient ability to deliberate on their future. He goes on to say that this particular feature that we have may be a result of the complex nature of our brains unlike that of the other animal species. "Perhaps self-consciousness is an intense form of consciousness, requiring exceptionally large neuron assemblies and sophisticated brains."[88]

This complexity itself is not something that was there before. We definitely find the finer qualities of the mind being associated with the evolutionarily new parts of the brain. It is a newly evolved factor. The *thalamus* that we consider to be rather of ancient origins[89] is not directly involved in the process of being conscious but functions rather as a relay station for the sensory impulses. Whereas the cortex region of the brain are of recent origin and are highly involved in conscious awareness as evidenced by states as seen in people who have damaged cortex and hence lack conscious awareness to a great extent.

In line with this, Damasio attempts making a picture of how various parts of the brain, both evolutionarily ancient and new, partake in the creation of the spectacle of consciousness.

> In interplay with the brain stem and the thalamus, the cortex constructs the maps that become mind. In interplay with the brain stem and thalamus, the cortex helps generate the core self. Last, using the records of past activity stored in its vast memory banks, the cerebral cortex constructs our biography, replete with the experience of the physical and social environments we have inhabited. The cortex provides us with an identity and places us at the center of the wondrous, forward-moving spectacle that is our conscious mind.[90]

When considering the finer aspects involved in the creation of autobiographical selves, we would be tempted to seek if there are any specific region that might be involved in providing some kind of coherence and balance to the story that we narrate about ourselves. There seems

[87] Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis*, p. 179.
[88] Greenfield, *Brain Story*, p. 185.
[89] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 10.
[90] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, Pp. 248-49.

to be regions specially involved in the narration of the self's story more than those brain regions that are involved in knowing the metabolism of the body or in meaningfully engaging with the outside world. There are editor regions, let's say, in the brain that helps individuals to form coherent and acceptable self concepts and turn those into socially acceptable behavior.

> Regulating our self is one of the major roles of the prefrontal cortex. These brain regions operate to coordinate competing thoughts and behaviour by inhibiting the excitatory commands arising from different regions. Without the executive control of our frontal lobes, we would be at the mercy of every whim, distraction, impulse, tic or urge that could threaten to sabotage any chance of achieving acceptance by the rest of society or fulfilling the goals we have set for our future self.[91]

This is made clearer in cases of alcohol misuse where the brain loses its inhibitory functions and the individual starts behaving in socially unbecoming ways. Alcohol has immense impact on the cognitive and behavioural responses of the prefrontal cortex, which is thought to be one of the most complex anatomical and functional structures of the mammalian brain that works to integrate and interpret inputs from the cortical and sub-cortical structures to develop intentional responses.[92] Under alcoholic influence, individuals sometimes behave contrary to their nature, contradictory to the pictures that others and they have of themselves.

But this project of locating special regions in the brain that deal with specialized tasks may not be a welcome project. It is not without any caution that even Ramachandran tries pinpointing certain regions of the brain that might be involved more in the whole process than others. He is cynical about the attitude with which many neuroscientists approach the problem of finding consciousness and the methods that they apply.

> For understanding consciousness and qualia, there would not be much point in looking at ion channels that conduct nerve impulses, at the brain stem reflex that mediates sneezing or at the spinal cord reflex arc that controls the bladder, even though these are interesting problems in themselves. They would be no more useful in understanding higher brain functions like qualia than looking at silicon chips in a microscope in an attempt to understand the logic of a

[91] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 79.
[92] Abernathy, et.al., "Alcohol and the Prefrontal Cortex", Pp. 289–320.

> computer program. And yet this is precisely the strategy most neuroscientists use in trying to understand the higher functions of the brain.[93]

Rightly said, we should not be expecting consciousness to be located in any particular part of the brain; it should rather be a product of the complex interplay of various parts of the brain – in the unified functioning of a brain. Form a functionalist perspective, minds differ from non-minds not in any distinctive substance or fundamental substrate, but in their systematic organization and the roles played by their parts and sub-parts. A minded system is simply one that is organized in the right sort of way, though just which ways those are is a difficult and disputed matter.[94] "The brain's operating system is probably not cleanly located in one special place. It is more likely to be distributed, in two senses: it may involve separate parts of the brain interacting together, and the active information in one of these parts, may be distributed over many neurons."[95]

Ramachandran clearly states that it is not all about the parts or the functions of the brain alone but about their interaction and unification that matters. He takes the debate of modularism and holism to a new level. He, instead of arguing that the seat of consciousness to be here or there, emphasizes the point that consciousness should be the result of some very complex neural networks in certain regions of the brain. He argues:

> As it stands, a wealth of empirical evidence supports the idea that there are indeed specialized parts or modules of the brain for various mental capacities. But the real secret to understanding the brain lies not only in unraveling the structure and function of each module but in discovering how they interact with each other to generate the whole spectrum of abilities that we call human nature.[96]

It is further strengthened by studies conducted by scientists who deal in information technology and consciousness. Researches show that a fragmented brain loses some of its integrated information and thus some of its consciousness.[97] The real secret might lie in different parts of the brain specializing minutely in their expertise and then sharing information with other such parts of the brain to produce a unified picture of the world, and similarly of the brain itself.

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[93] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 234.
[94] Gulick, "Functionalism", p. 128.
[95] Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis*, p. 205.
[96] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 11.
[97] Zimmer, "Sizing up Consciousness by its Bits".

After an analysis of the debate between the prospects of holism and modularism, the logical stand seems to be that the sense of the self that most of us experience emerges out of the orchestra of different brain processes like a symphony of the self, just as the Buddha and Hume said.[98] Ramachandran also tries to solve this debate on the 'where in brain' with the beautiful example of a television programme. He argues how illogical it is to ask in which part of the TV or the studio or the camera the programme is located. He also makes clear the absurdness in trying to locate the programme in the chair in the room or in his cat.

As far we know how a television works, the question about the *where* of the programme becomes absurd, but at the same time we know that some things are involved more in the production and reproduction of a TV programme than others. The same applies to the question of brain and selfhood as well.

> The conscious self is not some sort of "kernel" or concentrated essence that inhabits a special throne at the centre [of] the neural labyrinth, but neither is it a property of the whole brain. Instead, the self seem to emerge from a relatively small cluster of brain areas that are linked into an amazingly powerful network.[99]

It is true that certain regions of the brain are well involved into the formation of the self-concept. But the real mystery might be in the way they interact to produce that lofty feeling of being someone stable and abstractly distinct from the body. This is the position of Damasio as well in this matter:

> At neither modest nor robust levels do self and consciousness *happen* in one area or region or centre of the brain. Conscious minds result from the smoothly articulated operation of several, often many, brain sites. The key brain structures in charge of implementing the requisite functional steps include specific sectors of the upper brain stem, a set of nuclei in a region known as the thalamus, and specific but widespread regions of the cerebral cortex.[100]

In the article "Personhood and Neuroscience: Naturalizing or Nihilating", Martha J. Farah and Andrea S. Heberlein look at the possibility of locating personhood and concludes that more than naturalizing the concept, we end up nihilating it. Though we realize that there is nothing to be found, we do not really end up negating something – there was nothing in there from the beginning, it had always been that way, we have just realized that. All that we have

[98] Bruce Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. x.
[99] Ramachandran, *The Tell-tale Brain*, p. 249.
[100] Damasio, *Self comes to Mind*, p. 23.

is some concept about what our body and mind are all about and we have erred in giving ontological and objective status to them. There aren't any horses really flying in the skies just because we can have the concept of a flying horse. It is not only that it does not have any clear answer but the question itself seems to be poorly constructed. Our thinking has always been erroneous in assuming self is a thing to be found somewhere.

If we are trying to find or locate something or someone that we can call self, we might end up negating it for sure. There is nothing to be found inside the brain; error in trying to locate the self might lie in our thinking and language. All that we can do is to locate the self processes and the brain regions involved in it. But trying to locate the self processes in the brain and negating any nobler thinking substance inhabitant of the human body responsible for consciousness and self should not be degrading. The conclusion that Ramachandran makes about the whole process of neurophilosophy is marvelous. He concludes:

> Naturalizing the conscious mind and planting it firmly in the brain does not diminish the role of culture in the construction of human beings, does not reduce human dignity, and does not mark the end of mystery and puzzlement. …. Connecting personhood to biology is a ceaseless source of awe and respect for anything human. Last, naturalizing the mind may solve one mystery but only to raise the curtain on other mysteries quietly awaiting their turn.[101]

Self-concept is just like any other concept but except for its vividness, relevance and immediacy. The concept making process is unique too and we are more interested in the process than in locating the concept itself. All that we can locate in the brain is the self-concept making process. But the "selves", the subjects, objects, agents, connoisseurs, the judges, "are more 'in-the-world' than 'in-the-brain', and they are in-the-world *as-subject* more so than *as-object*."[102] What we wish to know is how the brain comes to have knowledge of the world, the remaining parts of the body and the outputs of its own processes, what we call the mental content, and form the self-concept. Time might have answers - not pinpointing to us the regions in the brain where we are, but showing us the structures involved in the process and how they interact to produce the special feeling of being self-beings. All that we have now are guesses about a few dark alleys where *I* could be hiding in the brain.

[101] Ibid., p. 29.
[102] Vogeley and Gallagher, "Self in the Brain", p. 129.

3.8. Structuring and Renaming the Homunculus

It is a matter of serious philosophical debate as to how we know that we know. A popular proposition is that of having a small being inside the human brain that gets to know what is happening in there. The position would demand another smaller being inside the small being, to know that it knows, and hence falling into an infinite regress. One could also propose a thinking being inside that is self-luminous and not requiring something else inside itself to be conscious, as in the Cartesian model.

In the debate on the existence of substantial selves in the first chapter, we argued against any such possibility. But dismissing a *small* being inside our head that knows everything, the problem does not get solved. There are still issues to be sorted out. If, it is the body that becomes self-conscious, then, how does that happen? In the previous sections we saw the role of brain in the making of self-concepts. It almost shows why there isn't any need for a different being inside for body to be conscious. Antonio Damasio states clearly that the dispositional representation I have in mind is neither created nor perceived by a homunculus[103] and goes on to explain how the relation between the limited body and the world outside leads to having conscious awareness. We have to explain the process that gives rise to the sense that there is a homunculus inside us.

According to Damasio, more than of a homunculus, consciousness is the function of the entire body. It is in regard to the interaction between the different functions of the body that there emerges some feature as consciousness, something that none of the functions alone could have generated, just like the different parts of the clock is not able to tell time. In Damasio's vision, even the highest flights of reason are set in motion, and kept in appropriate motion, by interactions with the rest of the body.[104] He goes on to make claims about reasoning and creation of the concept of a self. He says that human reasoning is never a matter of rule-governed manipulation of 'pure' propositions, but rather is *always* imagistic--even in those rare cases of sophisticated deduction in which the images that are being manipulated are of logical formulae.[105] Now if the brain knows everything through images, it may be a matter of concern still as to how it becomes conscious of them. According to Damasio, not all exploitation of map-like representations amounts to thought: "In other

[103] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, p. 242.
[104] Dennett, "Review of Antonio R. Damasio", p. 3.
[105] Ibid.

words, if our brains would simply generate fine topographically organized representations and do nothing else with those representations, I doubt we would ever be conscious of them as images."[106]

What else is demanded here for a conscious experience to be possible? It is the binding of these images and generation of meanings out of it. For the neural mechanism responsible for the creation of self to be complete, the images that are received into the brain have to be correlated. Now this is accomplished with a call to the rest of the world.

> In addition to the basic images, there are 'dispositional representations', specialist agencies that set off chains of reaction that reach deep down into the body's accumulated experience, thereby calling to mind (you might say) not only further images of reliably appropriate content, but 'somatic markers,' emotional states that color everything with specific varieties of urgency and calm, rendering various further thoughts relatively unthinkable, while driving others into attention.[107]

This might also go on to prove why in hypnotic states, people are able to recall much more information than what they can in conscious states. Many an event is suppressed as unthinkable chunks of data into the depth of mind so that the relevant ones get adequate attention. But this also tells us something more about the self making process.

The process of consciousness may not be a director-less affair. It works in calculated directions. While discussing the different aspects of self proposed by Neisser, we looked at how he argues that self-concept once formed works as a theory of mind for further experiences. The newer experiences are filtered and supported by the concept of self that we already have. We accept and reject stimulus in the light of what we think we are and the particular situations that we are in. Within such a repository of memories and preferences, similar stimuli must be given preference in experience. Involvement of this background data feeding might generate a sense that we are directed. How would one justify the acceptance of certain images to be more important than others if it were not for some direction? If we still were to look how this conglomeration of experience, memory, emotion, imagination etc comes in to produce consciousness and a sense of self, witness of these experiences, this need not always depend on speculation alone. Answers might be found in the human body itself.

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[106] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, p. 99.
[107] Dennett, "Review of Antonio R. Damasio: *Descartes' Error*", p. 3.

We have seen that the frontal cortex of the brain is thought to be more complex in comparison with the other regions and is considered to be the one that sets off the entire process of generating comprehension and hence a concept of self. But consciousness itself is not the property of it. It is the product of the activity that it kicks start.

> The frontal cortex has long been recognized to play a marked role in motivation and control, but too often it looms up through the mists of theory as the seat of the ego itself, the ultimate arbiter, the *fons et origo* of value (e.g., in Gerald Edelman's work), instead of as an important mediating agent between ancient bases of selfhood and their more modern components. The frontal region adds editorial commentary, applause or warning labels, and thereby calls up other ideas, not comprehending them all, but only semi-comprehending them. The comprehension of the whole agent is the emergent product of all the activity.[108]

Thus, it leads us to say that there is no other being inside the skull that uses the brain to know just as brain uses the eyes to receive visual stimuli. There is not a play to be managed. The completeness comes from the correlated functions of the bits and scraps of many functions. Thus, we present here the body as something that is aware of itself – a conscious body. The body becomes conscious of itself.

In the section on "self reflective self-beings" we saw how the brain talks to itself and how we can do away with any substantialist notion of self. It is the body functions that give rise to a sense of a homunculus inside us. But can we now look at the little man in a different light altogether? It could be a structure of the brain talking to other communication structures within the brain - the body talking to itself. The homunculus may not be a little person but a well connected region of neuronal activity.

Leading neuroscientists are of the view that there might be a real system that we have come to understand as a little human sitting inside the head. Homunculus may not be a fallacy after all, rather it may be one in our understanding. Ramachandran is very vocal about it. He claims that,

> …[m]etarepresentation bears an uncanny resemblance to the homunculus that philosophers take much delight in debunking. I suggest that the homunculus is simply either the metarepresentation itself, or another brain structure that emerged later in evolution for creating metarepresentations, and that it is either unique to us humans or considerably more

[108] Ibid., p. 4.

> sophisticated than a 'chimpunculus'. (Bear in mind, though, that it does not have to be a single new structure—it could be a set of novel functions that involves a distributed network….)[109]

The feedback loop system in the brain has to be broken into to see how the brain, smiling furtively, plunges us into all religious and philosophical difficulties. Ever since man discovered that there was something in him that was not there in the other animal species, he had been looking for a little man, spiritual or otherwise, sitting at the connoisseur's chair in the brain, editing, commenting, and knowing. The lookout for the 'I' who looks on at my body as an object and knows all about it, has gone on ceaselessly. The logical question arose naturally as to if there was another littler man inside him that allows the little man to know himself, thus leading subsequently to the fallacy of infinite regress.

The candidacy of the fallacy of infinite regress may have to be screened out once the little man, read as the intra communicating representation system of images, is understood not to need another man, read another system, to build in a cabin inside its head. The communication is happening with a system that is gaining first hand information about what is happening to the organism in relation to the world and its own manifold life supporting systems set within too. More importantly, the secret to our puzzle of reflexivity or reflective thinking might be that these systems also have an access into the mind of the brain as we have seen in the section on "A brain talking to itself". It (the primary information centres) also knows about what is happening in the second region (higher data chunking and abstracting region) of the brain which again has open access to the first region. The question of consciousness and enactment of self might be happening from this interconnected and open access communication system in the brain, talking relentlessly to itself. And the secret to our believing there is a homunculus inside us that is responsible for consciousness and self-direction, might be solved once the process of self narration is understood well, which we will attempt in the next chapter.

3.9. Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the feasibility of relieving the extra bodily thinking substance of its charges of being conscious of the body. We have discussed how a brain talking to itself, thanks to the numerous communication systems relaying information of the

[109] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, Pp. 116-17.

world and of itself back and fro, might explain our capacity to be self-reflective beings. We also looked at different brain pathologies of the self that affects our self-concept formation and self-consciousness. Lesions or other anomalies in the brain can throw us off the cliff into non-existence while being alive and awake. Compromised sense of self, in most of the cases, can be attributed to brain or neurological anomalies. The roots of bizarre cases like having no sense of self, or having fragmented or multiple selves can be traced into the human brain. What we wondered was how brain makes this happen. We proposed that it should be due to the capacity of the brain to know itself as an object just as it knows the world. The secret to consciousness and then to self should be the internal pathways of communication that carry information from and to within the brain. We also looked at why the homunculus fallacy could be understood as a structure of communication happening in the brain rather than another mysterious being inside. We might conclude that self and consciousness shouldn't be treated as mysteries, but *matter* - its nature and functions.

In the next chapter we would be looking more at the social and narrative aspects of self. What is the nature of this self-being? How does the sense of self work as a theory of mind and perform as a narrator to make the self-being a coherent and stable narration. We will also be looking at the significance of psychological defense mechanisms in framing coherent self narratives.

He allowed himself to be swayed by his conviction that human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves.

— Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*

Chapter Four

Minimal Self to Self-beings and the Nature of Narrative Selves

Chapter Four

Minimal Selves to Self-beings and the Nature of Narrative Selves

4.1. Introduction

Deep beneath the thriving socio-political discourses on identity narratives is the philosophical approach to the problem of self. When any aspect of life is emphasised to take over the whole of personal identity and discourses begin over it, there are multiple philosophical questions that pop up. Is there an essential self among or a unifier of all variant aspects that define what a person is? Do different identity constituents take turn to be in charge at appropriate social or personal situations? How are various aspects of a human person unified in the absence of a unifier?

In the previous chapters we had been looking at the philosophical problem of self identity and how the delicate material body works to create the sense of being an abstract permanent being. We have looked at the role of human brain and neurological mechanisms working as identity constituents from the perspectives of unfortunate persons with impaired or no sense of self. Here in this chapter, we will look into the nature of self-beings, along with reasons for its perceived unity and continuity.

4.2. *Selves* to *Self-beings*: Narratives as Enhancers

Notion of a persisting self might be one of the finest fictions that we have come to take for real. Necessity of a subject for subjectivity to be – a self *for whom* it is "what it is like to be" - and a being ontologically distinct from consciousness, for conscious to be possible, has long been argued for philosophically. We have seen in the preceding chapters how the search for such an ontologically distinct being inside the organism is hopelessly flawed and have argued that such enquiries should be replaced with epistemological enquiry of the organism's capacity and process of becoming conscious of it being a distinct self. How constructed notions of self makes one consider herself to be a temporally enduring being distinct from the body? – is the question to be explored.

When confronted with questions of characterisation, we need to define who we think we are, spelling out our beliefs and choices. We need to fill in the narratives that we are; it is a kind of fitting the coherent ones in and erasing the contradictory ones off. And we saw in the

second chapter how our self-concept works as a schema for this. We are into the constant process of creating our narratives and the process becomes a way of living too, a simultaneous process of authoring and living a protagonist. We thread our bygone past with a non-existent future in representing polished memories and prioritising our choices with whatever freedom and imagination we are endowed with. Thus, the question of self identity can also be looked at as a matter of characterisation; in preparing a story of what we are constituted of, our values, choices, projects etc., we are characterising ourselves.

But does understanding the problem of self as a question of characterisation place us any better on the peculiar ontological situation that we are in - creating and being a self-being at the same time, an entity that is simultaneously both the author and the protagonist? It could also be that we are telling stories about a given self than creating a self-being through our narrations. We need to ask as to what is the extent of freedom that one has in the whole process – is it one of construction or enhancement. Do we, by any means, have an essential-self or a core-self around which the web of self-narration can be spun?

Joel W. Krugner in his article "The Who and the How of Experience", makes this distinction clearer by suggesting two different ways of looking at the process of narration: i) Narrative Constitution Account (NCA); and ii) Narrative Enhancement Account (NEA). He defines the constitution account as "The self is ultimately nothing but a dense constellation of interwoven narratives, an emergent entity that gradually unfurls from (and is thus constituted by) the stories we tell and have told about us."[1] In this view, self is taken as the outcome of narrations and not as their source. And in the absence of proper narrations, there would be no self. There seems to be some inherent trouble with this understanding. But before looking at it we will also try to understand the other view of narration as self enhancement.

Narration-as-enhancement perspective is not as hard as the constitutive view. While accepting some aspects of the self to be emergent as a result of the organism's interaction with the environment, it acknowledges certain primitive elements of the self as given. He explains the enhancement account of narration as:

> ...[w]hile some aspects of the self (e.g. cultural and ethnic identifications, gender representations etc.) only emerge through the self's participation within different narratives, other more primitive features of the self (e.g. its neurobiological basis, core set of

[1] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 37.

> psychological characteristics or traits, its experiential status as a first-person perspective on the world etc.) are fixed independently of any sort of self-narrative.[2]

The existence of certain primitive aspects that make way for the capacity to narrate is emphasised here. The notion of a self is, of course an emergent one, but rooted in the givenness of the more basic and primitive elements of the organism. The trouble could be due to our understanding of the concepts and the problem could be disposed off if we clarify terms like self and persons, or what I wish call the *self-being*. For example, Marya Schechtman can easily be misunderstood while claiming that narration constitutes self, whereas she does not mean to.

> A person exists in the convergence of subjective and objective features. An individual constitutes herself as a person by coming to organise her experiences in a narrative self-conception of the appropriate form.[3]

She is speaking here of a person being constituted by narratives and she could be counted a narrative constructionist. But if the difference between *self* (we mean the given self or the minimal self) and the *self-being* (persons with the sense of being unique temporal beings) is made clear, as attempted in the first chapter, this could be understood in a different light altogether. Here she already claims that a person is the convergence of *subjective and objective* features. The objective features of given nature are well taken into account and the subjective narration here cannot bypass the objective givenness.

May be, narration can be understood as a constructive phase of persons and not of selves. By using *self* instead of *person* or *self-being,* are we not confusing the discourse? The self cannot be constituted by the stories we tell for the reason that there should be a self that makes subjective experience of the world possible, of which it tells stories later. Self could be a more rudimentary concept than person. All that is possible for narratives is to create persons with self-concepts, historicity and continuation.

While discussing about various brain pathologies in the last chapter, we saw certain cases like Korsakoff's syndrome, wherein the organisms could, in some way, be self-full beings having proper phenomenological engagement with the world but missing at the same time notions of their temporality. With no faculties to form or maintain memory and thread through their past

[2] Ibid. P. 36
[3] Schechtman, *The constitution of Selves*, p.134.

and future, they, nevertheless, continue to be minimal and momentary selves with their subjectivity intact. They lack the ability to form stories and tell the world how they relate to their life-worlds – about their capacity to experience, how they have experienced, and how they plan to engage further. They miss the organism's way of socially locating itself, entering into and becoming meaningful parts of the social narratives. Placing their situations the other way, we recognise what normal human beings do with narration and hence argue that narrations do not constitute selves, but rather enhances the emergence of self-beings, beings that identify themselves as unique social creatures exiting in and creating a history - selves they are.

All the while recognising the significance of narration for the development of self-concepts, we do emphasize that there is something metaphysically deeper in the constitution of self-concepts than the narration. Joel W. Krugner later in the article brings in Zahavi's concept of minimal self to substantiate the self enhancement account. And this seems to be logically and phenomenologically a move in the right direction. We have seen in section on self-pathologies the significance of having a primitive body mechanism, a being with subjectivity, as the basis for phenomenological experiences to happen and for the creation of healthy and consistent self-narratives. Self-construction (rather *self-being* construction) happens on something primitively given; it is enhancing what is already given – a minimal self becoming an autobiographical self.

With refined language at our disposal, all that we can is to become good story tellers. Who we are, is a story we tell of our phenomenological selves – a constructed narrative that our brain creates[4] of the minimal selves, its engagement with the world, and its history. And given the way our brains are hardwired, we cannot *help* but tell them.[5]

> At each moment the state of self is constructed, from the ground up. It is an evanescent reference state, so continuously and consistently *re*constructed that the owner never knows it is being *re*made unless something goes wrong with the remaking.[6]

We keep telling stories about how the organism perceives the world and what it thinks of the world. Even our reasoning is marked by this capacity to narrate. It is learnt that we don't just

[4] Bruce Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. xi.
[5] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 418.
[6] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, p. 240.

reason – we tell stories about how we reason.[7] And the distinct feature of telling one's story is that it is not merely a chronological ordering of the events in a person's life. It is a story about the *perceived* relation that the subject experiences of two events at different time locations and that calls for strong subjectivity and vouches for the significance of pre-narrative experiential selves. It is on the disconnected subjective experiences of the infantile organism that the roots of self-concept sprout. Narratives are of the remembered past and the anticipated future of this subjective minimal self, and the story telling process is a matter of enhancing rather than constructing the self-being. This is also evident from studies on the initial years of human life when infants fail to form memories.

The past, as seen before, is not recounted as a chronological happening of events but as to how the organism has experienced it and is about the relevance that the organism thought the experience had for itself. Hence, episodic memories that have special reference to the organism or autobiographical memories, memories of events where the agent herself is the protagonist, become all the more important for the construction of narratives. It is easier to remember stories that relate to us when we become the main character as it provides context and meaning to the whole experience.[8] The author can even manipulate both existing and new narratives to make them relevant in the larger narration, that it becomes coherent and meaningful as a whole. We discussed earlier how the existing self-concept is utilised as a theory of mind or a large frame into which such remembered / imagined events are coined into.

This may be the reason why we have no memory of the infantile life. As an infant we did not have the capacity to integrate our experiences into meaningful stories; we did not have an idea of who we were. To develop an initial sense of self that would help us in integrating our experiences further, one requires world experience and, in particular, learning from those about us who spend so much time in our company. Somewhere around two years, children start to have conversations with parents about past events.[9] Memory researcher Mark Howe argues that babies who fail the Gallup mirror test lack a sense of self, and so their memories are disconnected events – impressions that do not seem to make sense in any meaningful

[7] Hutto, *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, p. i; and MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 201.
[8] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 60.
[9] Ibid.

way.[10] Once the baby starts perceiving resemblance and relation between its experiences in the phenomenal world, there is no going back in the larger self-creating process.

All these go on to prove the possibility and existence of pre-narrative selves without memories – a history. We agree that self-beings are impossible without narrative capacity but disagree that narratives construct selves as such; they only form self-concepts. Organisms could be experiencing the world as long as they have their mind processes intact. They might just be language and imagination away from becoming fully active social animals, carving out their own spaces in the social narratives. From any point of view, the significance of pre-narrative experiential selves becomes evident in the formulation of self-concepts, and for the development of persons. It is the organism's capacity to look into the mind of pre-narrative selves that sets off the discourse of self, as seen in detail in the section "A brain that talks to itself" in the previous chapter. Narratives sprout from pre-existing givenness; humans are born into histories and socio-cultural frameworks. We also saw in the second chapter how the biological and social determinants form us into what we are. It is from initial identification with and the later urge to individualise by breaking away from the givenness that narratives originate. How *I as a subject* perceive this giveneness and wish to engage with it becomes significant, and that is what my story is - rather what I am.

Thus, we argue that narratives do not create selves but build temporality and unity in the phenomenal experiences of the organism. This process of protoself or the primitive bodily self transforming itself into autobiographical selves or persons with temporality has been attempted an explanation by Damasio. His account of autobiographical self is something unique and beautiful for the reason that unlike the social scientists, he does not take into account merely the social and temporal aspects of the self. He constructs his theory of autobiographical self from the bottom up and argues that autobiographical self or the narrative self is built upon the comparatively stable internal mechanisms of the organism. The awareness of the body, the givenness, is the foundation to healthy narratives. We will look into the process in the next section.

4.3. From lived-bodies to being Autobiographical Selves

In the previous section, we argued why narratives cannot be counted self-constructors, but self-enhancers. The minimal selves are given selves, or the body proper in a wider sense, and

[10] Howe and Courage, "On Resolving the Enigma of Infantile Amnesia", Pp.305-326.

narratives enhance them in becoming persons or what we call self-beings. Along with philosophical arguments, it would also be proper to look into the scientific accounts of what really happens in the process. The account of autobiographical self provided by Damasio seems to be making sense philosophically and scientifically. Recent philosophical discourses on self have seen two aspects of the self being given prominence: The phenomenal as well as temporal unity of self-consciousness and its social situatedness, what are called "minimal self" and "narrative self", in philosophical parlance.[11] In this section, we will be looking at the narrative account of the self as proposed elaborately by Antonio Damasio mainly in his recent work, the *Self Comes to Mind - constructing the conscious brain*.

Damasio understands self to be a process that has worked to great advantage for the human organism. Damasio clearly states his view that the self is a dynamic process and not a thing. It is due to our need to communicate complex ideas rapidly and effectively to others, that we have turned this process into a thing.[12] The reasons that he proposes for the emergence of consciousness and self process are purely natural. The consciousness making mechanisms of the brain were naturally chosen and consciousness prevailed in the human race for the reason of its survival value. Damasio claims "...that generating, orienting, and organising images of the body and of the outside world in terms of the organism's needs, increased the likelihood of efficient life management and consequently improved the chances of survival."[13] The advantages of knowing and deliberating over our engagement with the world over merely being and reacting are clearly evident in the natural world of the humans.

Damasio begins his account of self from a purely physiological perspective, and goes on to explaining the relation between the objects out in the world and the organism, and about the changes that the engagement causes in the body proper. His concept of autobiographical self, what we normally understand as a person with a history and future, a temporally extended conscious being, is constructed upon this foundation.

He differentiates between two types of consciousness as happening to the organism. The basic stage of consciousness that he calls core consciousness is more about selfhood than about identity. It is an awareness of the body and its engaging world just in the present with no recourse to the past and the future. The second stage of consciousness he proposes is about

[11] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 34.
[12] Damasio, *Self comes to Mind*, p. 165.
[13] Ibid., p. 175.

personhood and identity. He calls it extended or autobiographical consciousness and explains it as one that comes to be when a substantial part of one's life is coloured with the lived past and the anticipated future. This stage of consciousness is presided over by an autobiographical self.[14] He makes this distinction by way of explaining the formation of a self process in the organism.

Damasio explains it in three different stages. The organism begins with the scanning of its own body states – chemical and physiological and this basic awareness of the lived body he calls the protoself. The second stage arises when an object engages the organism and the organism's attention is directed towards the object and itself. The organism starts recognising itself as different from the object and comes to know of the chemical and physiological changes that the engagement has brought about in the body proper. He calls this new awareness as the core self. When recorded images of the organism's previous engagements with the world are called into attention and are allowed to cause changes in the protoself along with the present images, and the images of the resultant feelings are arranged together to form narratives, we come to be autobiographical selves. Thus the concept of self that we usually take to be a given-ness comes through, after elaborate steps of interactions, communications, and interpretations are achieved.

> ... [t]he self is built in stages. The simplest stage emerges from the part of the brain that stands for the organism (the *protoself*) and consists of a gathering of images that describe relatively stable aspects of the body and generate spontaneous feelings of the living body (primordial feelings). The second stage results from establishing a relationship between the *organism* (as represented by the protoself) and any part of the brain that represents an *object-to-be-known*. The result is the *core self*. The third stage allows multiple objects, previously recorded as lived experience or as anticipated future, to interact with the protoself and produce an abundance of core self pulses. The result is the *autobiographical self*.[15]

It has been widely accepted in recent philosophical discussions and we have seen while discussing about self-pathologies that we can be pre-reflexive beings with embodied first person perspectives without being forced at the same time to reflect over it or to produce narratives about this capability. Basic forms of subjectivity or minimal phenomenal selfhood does not require narratives. The first-person perspective, or the subject to whom the world is given in a first-personal mode of presentation, is phenomenologically and ontologically prior

[14] Ibid., Pp.168-69.
[15] Ibid., Pp.180-81.

to the narrative self.[16] Damasio begins his account of the autobiographical self from this particular given aspect about the body. He understands the self processes as especially efficient at orienting and organizing minds towards the homeostatic needs of their organisms and thus increasing the chances of survival.[17] Consciousness and self functions are added to the organism for bettering this survival chances.

The internal repository of images held about the body, the world and the feelings that the external objects cause on the body and the ability to recall them at will help the organism in understanding, interpreting and predicting the world – facilitating its survival chances. And knowing, as opposed to being and doing, paved way for not only deliberation on action but also for the reflection on a protagonist to whom these changes were happening. The mind started focusing on the organism to know *what it was that* the changes were happening to, or who was the one who recalled memories of similar situations from the past and deliberated on the possible line of action at present? Damasio sees the essence of self to be precisely this. "The essence of the self is a focussing of the mind on the material organism that it inhabits."[18] Again, he does not mean mind as a thing that inhabits the body; it is the mind process rather.

There is a feeling of being a body that arises from the awareness of the body's basic existence as distinct from the world. This primordial feeling "that my own body exists, and it is present, independently of any object with which it interacts, as a rock-solid, wordless affirmation that I am alive"[19] gives rise to the some kind of ownership. The mapping of the body and its states and feelings that happens mechanically is the first step towards the formation of a full blown notion of self.

The protoself is the stepping-stone required for the construction of the core self. "It is *an integrated collection of separate neural patterns that map, moment by moment, the most stable aspects of the organism's physical structure*. The protoself maps are distinctive in that they generate not merely body images but also *felt* body images."[20] This mapping in turn provides the basic feelings of unity and permanence to the organism, based on which we go on to construct the story of an eternally enduring and substantial self that must be occupying

[16] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 38.
[17] Damasio, *Self comes to Mind*, p.182.
[18] Ibid., p.180.
[19] Ibid., p.185.
[20] Ibid., p.190.

the body. With these mental processes understood to be happening to someone, the creation of the protagonist begins and then there is a sudden jump in the whole affair of survival prospects; for, the question is now about the survival of someone and not merely about mechanical reactions to the world.

But how is the sense of permanence brought about in a body, of which nothing is permanent? Everything about the body – its cells, form, location, nature - is liable to change. Now Damasio presumes that it should be any particular part of the body *within* and not the entire body as a unit has to be looked into for aspects of relative permanence. There has to be something about the body that changes the least or does not change at all.

Damasio proposes that it is the internal milieu and many visceral parameters associated with it that provide the most invariant aspects of the organism at any age across a lifetime. And it is not because they do not change but because their operations require that their condition vary only within an extremely narrow range.[21] He further explains that the essence of the chemical bath in which life occurs—the average range of its parameters—is approximately the same no matter the person is a child or an adult and the changes that must have happened to the other parts of the body. It is also for the reason that the biological essence of a state of fear or happiness is in all likelihood the same in terms of how such states are constructed from the chemistries in the internal milieu and the state of contraction or dilation of smooth muscles in the viscera. Even the emotional profile of one's reaction to a state of fear or happiness is almost the same, though the causative factors might change.[22]

> In brief, the combination of the internal milieu, the visceral structure, and the basal state of the externally directed sensory portals provides an island of stability within a sea of motion.[23]

Thus, the basic sense of permanence and stability is provided within the organism itself and it is from this basic feeling of unity and permanence that the organism goes on to build up proper self-concepts. But as seen before, this sense of permanence and stability needs not to be a conscious state. The minimal self certainly depends on brain processes and an ecologically embedded body, and one does not have to know or be aware of this to have an experience that still counts as a [minimal, or pre-narrative] self-experience.[24]

[21] Ibid., p. 194.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., p. 200.
[24] Shaun Gallagher, "Philosophical Conceptions of Self", P. 15.

Basics of all that we are can be traced back to the body along with its primordial felt feelings, which defines the materiality of my being. But looking at the autobiographical self or the extended and socially situated self, we understand that the scope of a proper self-concept is much broader than that of the body. A full-blown concept of self cannot be dependent solely on this relative permanence. In such case, "[T]he self would amount to the unadorned and *felt* representation of life within the brain, a sheer experience unconnected to anything but its own body."[25] Personhood and identity that we experience across temporal locations cannot be accounted for by the protoself and its primordial feelings alone. Something significant happens here about the body and the way it phenomenologically engages with the world and interprets the experiences meaningfully. Thus, for the production of the narrative self, we need an intermediary stage of engagement with the world, which Damasio calls the core self stage.

Interacting in close proximity with an object out in the world, the protoself gets modified in different ways. Its primordial feelings are altered when it comes to engage any particular object with the "feeling of knowing the object" and it comes to differentiate the object from itself, other objects around or in the mind. In the next step, the organism's attention is drawn on the object in focus with the intension of knowing and feeling it deeper. The whole process gives to the mind images of an object that it is engaged with and the change of feelings that the felt object produced in the body. The organism becomes aware of the object outside the world and of itself as a body that is being changed by external engagement, resulting in the creation of self-awareness.

> ... [t]he production of pulses of core self relative to a large number of objects interacting with the organism guarantees the production of object-related feelings. In turn, such feelings construct a robust self process that contributes to the maintenance of wakefulness. The core self pulses also confer degrees of value upon the images of the causative object, thus giving it more or less salience.[26]

And it is all about images being produced of the organism, the object, and the emotional responses caused.

> What is being added to the plain mind process and is thus producing a conscious mind is a series of images, namely, an *image* of the organism (provided by the modified protoself

[25] Damasio, *Self comes to Mind*, p. 202.
[26] Ibid., p. 205.

> proxy); the *image* of an object-related emotional response (that is, a feeling); and an *image* of the momentarily enhanced causative object. *The self comes to mind in the form of images, relentlessly telling a story of such engagements*.[27]

Damasio thus claims that the core self is produced by linking the object that caused the modification with the modified protoself itself. The relation between the two has been defined by factors of feelings and attention. Because such changes were caused in the body, a spontaneous thought is portrayed in the mind, that there should be a protagonist to whom the changes must be happening, just as there is a subject for every happening out in the world. Thus arise notions of a protagonist, an abstracted concept of the material body to which the changes have in fact happened.

> The portrayal in the nonverbal narrative simultaneously creates and reveals the protagonist, connects the actions being produced by the organism to that same protagonist, and, along with the feeling generated by engaging with the object, engenders a sense of ownership.[28]

But this process of engaging the world or making images about the world and the engaged protoself is not interpretative. It is non-verbal and just a spontaneous description of events; adding interpretation to this process and asking questions as to whom the changes are happening lead to the rise of consciousness and self-concepts. And the autobiographical selves are on their way. "In brains endowed with abundant memory, language, and reasoning, narratives with this same simple origin and contour are enriched and allowed to display even more knowledge, thus producing a well-defined protagonist, an autobiographical self."[29] It is from a need to explain about the core self and the newly found protagonist, to whom the changes are happening, that probably the autobiographical self emerged.

> Core consciousness does not require language and must have preceded language, obviously in nonhuman species but also in humans. In effect, language would likely not have evolved in individuals devoid of core consciousness. Why would they have needed it? On the contrary, at the highest grades on the scale, autobiographical consciousness relies extensively on language.[30]

It must have been by telling the world and oneself about the core self, that humans got to have autobiographical selves. The way we started being narrative animals – narrating how we

[27] Ibid., p. 203.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., p. 204.
[30] Ibid., p. 172.

have experienced the world, how we perceive and predict it and how we do and plan to engage with it. And it is with the help of the core self mechanism that the organism is able to create the autobiographical self. Damasio emphasises this point that "...the autobiographical self can be constructed only by means of the core self mechanism. The core self mechanism as just described, anchored in the protoself and its primitive feelings, is the central mechanism for the production of conscious minds."[31]

The sum total of our life experiences or personal memories and the experiences of our plans for the future are called into while forming our autobiographies. When the unwritten autobiography of ours, including all that we are or that we plan to be, becomes the conscious content of our minds, we call ourselves autobiographical selves. "Autobiographical selves are autobiographies made conscious."[32] The experiences of the world, human and nonhuman societies, our feelings, emotions, beliefs, preferences and decisions all fall in line to form what we call our autobiography. The formation is made in order to solidify the sense of a protagonist that we have been encountering faintly even in the previous states of consciousness. The protagonist has to be made vivid, for the purpose of presenting to the world and to oneself.

But given the abundance of the mental content that each organism possesses, it is rather quite impossible to call all of it into memory at once and present it as a picture of ours. In fact, "...we do not need to recall all of them or even most of them, whenever our selves operate in autobiographical mode"[33] and "...we rely on key episodes, a collection of them actually, and, depending on the needs of the moment, we simply recall a certain number of them and bring them to bear on the new episode."[34] Thus, the self-concept that we have, what we think ourselves to be and present before others is only particular perspectives of all that we are, depending on the situational relevance.

Damasio tries explaining the definite mechanisms involved in this aspect of self-formation. Substantial sets of autobiographical memories are called in from memory and are grouped together. Each of the recollected memories interacts with the protoself and cause changes in the tranquil states of the protoself. Thus, the feeling of ownership of those memories caused by intentional knowing of them, and the sense of a protagonist are evoked. Due to the large

[31] Ibid., p. 204.
[32] Ibid., p. 210.
[33] Ibid., p. 211.
[34] Ibid.

quantity / profoundness of the memories and related sensations presented to the protoself and the various levels of emotions and changes caused, the coordinated mechanism sorts them out into coherent patterns and meaningful structures of narration. Thus, it is with the constant interaction with the protoself and the images created by the core self mechanism that autobiographical selves are formed.

> ... [w]e can say that constructing the autobiographical self depends on two conjoined mechanisms. The first is subsidiary to the core self mechanism and guarantees that each biographical set of memories is treated as an object and made conscious in a core self pulse. The second accomplishes a brain-wide operation of coordination that includes the following steps: (1) certain contents are evoked from memory and displayed as images; (2) the images are allowed to interact in an orderly manner with another system elsewhere in the brain, the protoself; and (3) the results of the interaction are held coherently during a certain window of time.[35]

Once an image is made of the protagonist, the conscious and non-conscious process of narration begins. Narration takes into account different aspects of life like the peculiarities of the situation, the memories of past experiences, the situation of the organism, the nature of the audience, the relevance of what one has to present, all come into consideration.

Autobiographical self is the result of organism's interpretation about its understanding of its own body and the world, the engagement of the two in the past and its future plans of engagement etc. This is not a mechanical process unlike in the case of the protoself and the core self. Here deliberate interpretations are done, relevant images and memories are called into attention, irrelevant aspects are discarded, missing links are creatively filled in, in the light of the resources –all with the help of language in the interpretative regions of the brain which the neuroscientists have roughly located to the left hemisphere of the brain.[36] Not an easy task done. In the next section we will see how the myriads of images differing in nature and intensity are carved into a single coherent narration. The consistency and coherence just does not come naturally, there are mechanisms working to bring it about.

4.4. Malleable Self-concepts and Consistent Narratives

A wonderful feature of our narrative capacity is that we just don't recount events as they happened chronologically in the past but remember them as having happened to *us* that they

[35] Ibid., pp. 212-13.
[36] Gazzaniga, *The Mind's Past***,** p. 14.

become relevant to the narratives that we had been living by until then. We remember events better where we ourselves were the protagonists or in thick of the event's happening. It is all the more important considering the magnitude of external and internal stimuli that the human brain is bombarded with every waking moment. Inputs relevant to the story that one is, are chosen pre-dominantly and fit into an already functioning schema of self-narrative; the story has to be coherent.

> In order to generate coherent actions, the brain must have some way of sifting through this superabundance of detail and of ordering it into a stable and internally consistent "belief system" – a story that makes sense of the available evidence. Each time a new item of information comes in we fold it seamlessly into our pre-existing worldview.[37]

This is how the narration becomes an ongoing process, linking the present to stories from the past and taking them into the future with amazing consistency and coherence.

But what happens in situations where the fresh data coming in goes conspicuously against the self-concept that we have been living by until then? It is assumed that we manipulate them, often signifying or repressing aspects, while confirming them to memory. We also restructure our memories in order to fit them into the modified narratives that we are. How would a person who considers himself to be saintly react when confronted with his evil intention to cheat someone? The two possibilities are: either he denies the evil thought and protects his existing self-concept; or he restructures his narrative to conclude that he isn't as holy as was thought. The process of forming self-narratives is more complex than usually taken to be.

A noticeable feature of our self-narratives is that we, as authors, are open to all sorts of distortions for reasons of expectation. And our actual self is prone to all sorts of repression and distortion in the process of getting fitted into this totalitarian ego or the ideal self-concept. Although the process of self-narration is unconscious for the most part, it is more dynamic than what we can imagine. Simply put, the story of our selves would be ones that we expect ourselves to be most sure of, as they are aggregation of the history that we lived in, our dreams, thoughts and plans - it is all *ours*. But the fact remains that the self-concept that we have or the self-narrative that we think we are in command of, is dangerously deceptive and delicate.

[37] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 134.

The price we pay for maintaining healthy self-concepts and relatively consistent behaviour patterns would be much of self-deception and lying, of course, majority of it being unconscious and healthy. Look at the different aspects of becoming what we are: The way we relate to the world is kind of imperfect and based on cues and clues, with the brain filling in everything that we unnoticeably miss, to provide complete pictures; the memories that we hold dear to us as our very personal past are all distorted every time we call them up to mind - even our recording and recall of memory is selective and deceptive; the most trusted aspect of our self-knowledge – that of introspection and self ascription, one covered in philosophical infallibility might be proved otherwise as well; and finally, the narratives that we present may contradict information what we know to be true. Let us look at each of these aspects in detail below.

The way brain constructs models of the world outside, weaves experiences into coherent stories, and enables us in interpreting and predicting the world is marvellous. It is for the brain's capacity to simulate the world that we can meaningfully engage with the world, and this simulation is remarkable for the reason that much of the data that needs processing are corrupted. The brain fills in missing information, interprets noisy signals and has to rely on only a sample of everything that is going on around us.[38] This can also be proved from the existence of two blind spots in our visual field, in the size of lemons at arm's length. It is very much in the field of our vision but we never notice it.[39]

Our peripheral vision is smeared and colourless, yet one could swear that it is perfectly clear just like the centre of our visual field. Or everything in the visual world appears seamless and unbroken, even when our visual world is blacked out for a fraction of a second between eye movements.[40] We said the way we take the world in is marvellous for the very reason that we are not made aware of any of these imperfections. It is not just with vision but true for all human sensory experiences. We even pick and choose sensations relevant to us just like in the case of a mother who would hear her child crying even if no one else in the group noticed it. "Our self-centred way of constructing the story means that we only pay attention to those events as we see them being related to us."[41] The picture of our internal world could similarly

[38] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. xi.
[39] Ibid., p. ix.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., p. 171.

be flawed too. And the reason we do not realize any of these is that our brain is a good story teller, filling in every gap and connecting between whatever is available.

Imperfections involved in our sensory world do not leave us there – they follow deeper. The way we record and recall our experiences are notoriously selective and manipulative and our self-concepts are formed mainly on the foundations of these memories. When Locke said conscious awareness of one's own history was important for unique personal identity, he was in all probability pointing to autobiographical memories. We are partially sum of our memories but the fact remains that our memories may not be solid as we suppose them to be – they are modified and even at times confabulated. "One of the greatest discoveries in psychology is that human memories are reconstructed and malleable. We do not have a recording of our own personal experiences in our head like some video archive."[42]

Remembering is a constantly active process as memories are like stories repeatedly told gaining or losing details and significance in the process. We do not remember incidents time and again the same way they were registered; rather, we remember what we said about them the last time we did. Moreover, every new experience of ours is interpreted in the light of existing memories and is located into them, causing changes to the old memories as well in the process. What we are to remember are sieved through our existing self-concepts.

> …[w]e tend to remember information that fits with our idealized self and conveniently ignore that which does not. If we believe that we have a particular trait of personality then we selectively interpret events that are consistent with that belief. In fact, we can easily interpret general statements to make them seem particularly relevant to us.[43]

This process was made famous by Freud in the name of repression where we through an active mental process "forget" or "push down" any thoughts that arouse anxiety into the unconscious.[44] It is evident from the fact that people

> ...[h]ave difficulty retrieving anxiety provoking or threatening information, and what is associated with that information, from long term memory. Perhaps this helps to explain why

[42] Ibid., p. 57.
[43] Ibid., Pp. 171-2.
[44] Morgan and King, *Introduction to Psychology*, p. 588.

> people generally remember pleasant events more often than they do unpleasant ones; the unpleasant memories have been repressed.[45]

People actively forget memories of threatening events that what they do not wish to recall. For example, individuals have difficulty in calling to mind memories from certain critical and stressful moments in their life, a loss of memory called psychogenic amnesia.[46] Self-preservative act of forgetting helps people overcome memories that might lead to overwhelming anxiety or even suicidal thoughts. Through a sub-conscious censorship unwarranted or dangerous memories are blocked from entering the conscious or are repressed. In psychogenic amnesia, normal autobiographical memory processing is blocked by an imbalance of stress hormones in the brain, especially in the limbic system regions involved in memory formation.[47] In such cases, more than forgetting, we also forget that we have forgotten, making the circle complete. We take in sensations selectively, interpret and manipulate them, remember some of them and end up recalling them differently. How do we trust a self-concept that depends on such memories seriously selective and corruptible? This does not happen for no reason – the result is that we have consistent and coherent self-concepts, and exceptional narratives.

Greater surprises await us in areas considered to be epistemologically immune to error. When it comes to making our self-narrative consistent with social and our own expectations for consistency and acceptance, we might be surprised at the errors creeping into the most private areas of our life. Unlike what is usually thought, the principle of self attribution in introspection does not work at times, and we end up reporting what we are expected to or what we expect should have been happening, when asked about what is happening within us. We are often miserably mistaken when it comes to reporting our own psychological processes. While being asked about the problem solving methods used, people might give confabulated reports of the actual methods they have employed. While writing on "self-attribution" psychologists Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson claimed that,

> ...in many cases introspection may not involve privileged access to one's own mental states but rather the imposition upon oneself of popular theories about what mental states a person in one's situation is likely to have. This possibility should be

[45] Ibid., p. 207.
[46] Collette, et. al. "Psychogenic amnesia and self-identity ", Pp. 1422–1425
[47] Human-memory.net, "The Human Memory: What it is, how it works, and how it can go wrong".

> considered seriously when evaluating many of the traditional claims about the alleged incorrigibility of people's access to their own minds.[48]

Even the most personal space of our life is not immune to modifications and error, it seems. Even we may not know what we really are, but what we are expected to be. The narratives that we take much pain to construct are framed to be acceptable to the society – we aren't in real control. Not only in reporting our mental events, even in presenting ourselves we might be what we are expected of, not what we are. It is noticeable among teenagers who struggle with matters of identity and values:

> A frequent way to find security in this period of confusion is by adopting the clothes, hairstyle, and manners of the "in" group at school or of a current media star. In this way, for the time being, the adolescent knows who he is, or at least what he should look like, on the outside. His sense of self is protected through the use of the defense of identification.[49]

The motive behind self-deception is to look acceptable and reliable – what matters to the society are foolproof self-narratives, in outlook and expressions. When we speak of self-narration, we are trying to understand the way how our experiences, memories and plans are threaded into consistent stories and presented to the world - how we ourselves become relatively predictable and reliable persons working in the social arena. We have seen above and in discussions on patients with pathologies of self, how painstakingly the brain manages the whole show. Patients with certain brain anomalies or physical disabilities take defence mechanisms to such an extent that they out rightly deny or emphasize facts that are clearly evident otherwise.

In a disorder called Anosognosia, an extreme form of neglect, the patient with a paralyzed left arm caused by right hemisphere damage will deny her paralysis. A patient with such an ailment might think and *sincerely believe* that the paralyzed side of her body is absolutely fine and functions as though there was nothing wrong about it. This results from right hemisphere lesions in the brain.[50] In another bizarre syndrome called Anton's syndrome, a patient who is blind owing to cortical damage denies that she is blind.[51] It is seen here how the brain itself is involve.ed in damage control operations and try to fix bodily awareness to the normal concept that one has of the body. The process of denial is so strong here that the

[48] "Philosophy of Mind", *Encyclopædia Britannica.*
[49] Cramer, *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action,* p. 6.
[50] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind,* Pp. 41-42,121.; Ramachandran, *The Tell Tale Brain,* p. 258.
[51] Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis*, p. 271.

very ownership of the damaged parts of the body is meddled with. In some cases, the patient may even claim that the paralyzed organs of the body belong to someone else.[52] In many cases, the confabulation that happens in these patients might be similar to what normal persons employ in getting away with those minor inconsistencies that happen in normal lives. When certain things deviate from the expected story line, we take recourse to various defence mechanisms so that our narratives remain intact.

Ramachandran claims that this process of deceiving oneself is crucial to our survival as social beings. "Far from being an epiphenomenon, the sense of self must have evolved through natural selection to enhance survival and, indeed, must include within it the ability to preserve its integrity and stability – even deceiving itself when necessary."[53] These claims may be way beyond mere speculation. Our inclination towards explaining the world through consistent stories is founded in the human brain, and the system that unconsciously work to make our narratives consistent is speculated to be localized in the left hemisphere.[54,55] Ramachandran has attempted a broad explanation of what might be happening in the two hemispheres of the brain in relation to the application of defence mechanisms. When confronted with situations that do not go in tune with our existing self-concept, what the left hemisphere does,

> ...is either ignore the anomaly completely or distort it to squeeze it into your pre-existing framework, to preserve stability. And this, I suggest, is the essential rationale behind all the so-called Freudian defences – the denials, repressions, confabulations and other forms or self-delusions that govern our daily lives. ... The penalty, of course, is that you are "lying" to yourself, but it's a small price to pay for the coherence and stability conferred on the system as a whole.[56]

It is probably for the influence of the left hemisphere of the brain that we have consistent self-narratives. Assumingly, the left hemisphere works hard to make the narrative look coherent. This is made evident by studies on the behaviour of persons with right or left hemisphere damages. As we have seen in the previous chapter, patients with right hemisphere damage tend to deny certain bodily anomalies like paralysis etc. In such cases, the left

[52] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, Pp. 131-33.
[53] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, p. 121.
[54] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, p. 134.
[55] Gazzaniga, et.al., "Some Functional effects of sectioning the Cerebral Commissures in Man", Pp. 1765–9.
[56] Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, Pp. 134-35.

hemisphere of the patient's brain is given a free hand to go on a spree of denial, at times even at the expense of being evidently self-contradictory. This does not happen when the damage is of the left hemisphere; here patients readily acknowledge the new state that their body is in. In normal cases, we do take time to rethink about the whole story that we have believed our nature to be and at times make comprehensive changes to our self-concept in the light of new information that we come to have. This questioning must be the work of the right hemisphere, so thinks Ramachandran.

> The right hemisphere's strategy, on the other hand, is to play "devil's advocate", to question the status quo and look for global inconsistencies. When the anomalous information reaches a certain threshold, the right hemisphere decides that it is time to force a complete revision of the entire model and start from scratch. The right hemisphere thus forces a "Kuhnian paradigm shift" in response to anomalies, whereas the left hemisphere always tries to cling tenaciously to the way things were.[57]

Though it is mostly the left hemisphere that makes our narration coherent and consistent, it is in the coordinated efforts of both the hemispheres that we have healthy and realistic notions of self. For, if the left hemisphere was given a free hand and that was all there to happen, then we all would have been in pathological states of consistent denials and repressions. But this does not happen; it is a balanced act.

The prefrontal cortex is also involved in a very significant way in making the narrative coherent and balanced. The region inhibits impulsive thoughts and behaviour and betters our chances of survival in the society,[58] and the impact of alcohol on this behaviourally important region is explicitly seen in our coherent self-creating process.[59] Now these are broad speculations about the role of brain in the application of defence mechanisms and also about the brain mechanisms involved in the process of making our narrative consistent and acceptable.

It is quite clear that the brain has a strong system of dealing with the inconsistencies that pop-up in one's everyday life and in presenting oneself as a consistently functioning organism, be it by filling in missing information or by removing inconsistent ones. The existing self-concept works as guideline for the same. Once formed, it sieves through any new information

[57] Ibid., p. 136.
[58] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 79.
[59] Abernathy, et.al., "Alcohol and the Prefrontal Cortex", Pp. 289–320.

coming in from the world outside or within. Neisser claims, "[w]hat we notice and how we interpret it depends substantially on what we already believe, so that fundamental changes are rare after a theoretical framework has once been established."[60]

We perceive what we wish to, or what we think is relevant to the narratives that we have constructed and tend to neglect or even actively repress irrelevant and contradictory information. We tend to remember pleasant events as having happened to us. We also reframe and modulate our memories or our self-concept in line with the new information. We repress unpleasant memories and have difficulty in recalling information related to them. We, while in the process of narration, interpret the world as to fit it into the larger frame of mind that we already have. We also looked at how the left hemisphere of the brain is involved in the process of editing our self-concept. The everyday defence-mechanisms keep us coherent and healthy as far as our self-concepts are concerned and in case of those unfortunate persons with pathological excess of their application of defence mechanisms, they end up having damaged and self-contradictory self-images.

4.5. Selves: Abstract Centres or Centre-less Narratives?

After arguing that narration is rather of enhancing nature than constitutive, we looked at how the whole process comes to happen in a bundle of matter, demarcated with a boundary and having relatively self-sustaining internal systems. Having seen how the self (minimal) becomes a self-being (person) through the stages of proto self, core self and autobiographical self, we now move on to ask what is the nature of the autobiographical self, the final product. How does the narrating self manage and present itself as a numerically single and temporally identical being to itself and whatever it is not? Does a self, something that was not before, emerge to be or are we just illusions that we feel we are? Is there a possibility that there are different selves struggling to take control of the same body? Or is it a robust one that takes control of our life and decides how the narrative should be going ahead, directing our perceptions and thoughts?

We will look at two different accounts on the nature of the narrative self. Daniel Dennett argues that the self is just an abstraction that happens to us due to various biological and social factors. He defines self as an abstract center of gravity, according to which, the individual self consists of the abstract and movable point where the various stories that the

[60] Neisser, "Five Kinds of Self-knowledge", p. 401.

individual tells about himself, or are told about him, meet up. Paul Ricouer looks at the nature of the narrative self through a different perspective. The model proposed by him is more extended and distributed, in which, self is not an abstract center but an extended self which is de-centered and distributed. Now we will look at each of them in detail.

4.5.1. Self as Abstract Centres

Dennett explains the origin of self from a biological perspective, beginning with the concept of boundary between the world outside and the organism. The beginning of life forms signals some kind of self-forms as well – there is something that distinguishes a rat from a stone. The elementary biological criterion that helps one to distinguish from whatever *it is not* in the universe and provides self-preservation instincts must be some sort of a minimal self. The basic immune system in the body functions as though it was an army set up to preserve the integrity and autonomy of a bundle of matter that billions of body cells have come to form. They work as though ordered by a commander, well distinguishing what belongs to the union of bodies including myriads of bacteria and other harmless living forms inside the body from external intruders. Dennett rightly acknowledges these biological norms of life, from where the self begins.

> The original distinction between self and other is a deep biological principle; one might say it is the deepest principle, for biology begins in *self*-preservation--in the emergence of entities (the simplest replicators) who resisted destruction and decay, who combatted, at least for a short time, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and passed on their capacity to do this to their descendants.[61]

Since the self-account of Dennett is based upon the biological metabolism of the body, it is good to understand the nature of this basic self-function, before looking at his narrative account per se. Let us start with the concept of minimal self. The minimal self is nothing to be found in the body, in the brain or inside any atom or behind any neuron. This can be understood as an abstract law that creates the basic drawing of boundaries and what one comes to protect as one's own.

> So a minimal self is not a *thing* inside a lobster or a lark, and it is not the "whole lobster" or "whole lark" either; it is something abstract which amounts just to the existence of an organization which tends to distinguish, control and preserve portions of the world, an

[61] Dennett, "The Origins of Selves".

> organization that thereby creates and maintains boundaries. To a first approximation the principle that draws the boundary is this: You are what you control and care for.[62]

The function does not happen somewhere inside the body proper or in any particular parts of the body. In matters of preservation and control the whole body is controlled through different mechanisms and the bodily communication system runs its organizing activity through myriads of sensory and motor neurons. The individualized functions and systems of the body function in quite organized ways, almost autonomously as though they are pre-destined for the same, giving away the impression that there is a commander-in-chief who commands. Resultantly, it also gives the impression that the commander has left the scene to unbothered chaos or nothingness when the system crumbles at death or the functions fall apart much earlier. Another exception to this rule of self-preservation would be cases of auto-immune disorders where the immune system takes certain parts of the body for alien players and declares war upon those regions, leading to civil wars practically.

But the point that Dennett wants to emphasize here is that all these happen without the ordering of a chieftain. The Buddhists point to the row of ants moving in perfect order and synchrony and argue that it is such a coordinated motion of factors that gives rise to the notion of an enduring and persisting sense of self. Dennett looks deep into the same ant colonies to argue that even the complicated human organisms work without the ruling of any chief, just the way these ant colonies do. He draws master plan for his theory of self from this wonder of group cohesion among the ants.

> The group cohesion and coordination is so remarkable that hard-headed observers have been led to postulate the existence of a colony's "group soul" (*vide* Marais' "The Soul of the White Ant". Yet in fact all this group wisdom results from nothing other than myriads of individual termites, specialized as several different castes, going about their individual business - influenced by each other, but quite uninfluenced by any master-plan.[63]

This argument that there is no central commanding officer who is to be identified as the self as far the biological functions of preservation and maintenance are concerned, can also be seen in Dennett's theory of what leads to consciousness. Just as different primordial activities go on in the human body in somewhat autonomous way, thousands of sensory inputs struggle for attention and responsive action every waking moment. There is no one deciding which

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

input has to be taken into account and has to be deliberated upon – rather made conscious. It happens as a mechanical way of struggle – the prominence is decided by the perceived relevance and threat, based on past experiences and related information.

It is the organism's way of responding to the nature in a better way that without the presence of any manager, the body works a way out to manage its own affairs. While admitting consciousness to be a way of self-teaching or training, Dennett argues that we can get some initial understanding of how this schooling might actually work. He says,

> ...[o]n the supposition that we are not the captains of our ships; there is no conscious self that is unproblematically in command of the mind's resources. Rather, we are somewhat disunified. Our component modules have to act in opportunistic but amazingly resourceful ways to produce a modicum of behavioural unity, which is then enhanced by an illusion of greater unity.[64]

This behavioural unity is also warranted by the way the communication system functions in the organism. Internal communication and the lack of it play important roles in Dennett's theory of self as abstract centres. Many of the systems work almost autonomously in the human organism and the internal communication system between them is also enhanced by the brain's ability to fill in. It fills in the missing link from a perspective that has been decided and experimented as conducive to survival. We have seen in the previous section how the sensory inputs are made meaningful and continuous and that the brain is an excellent stage manager and fills in the gaps and disconnects by telling stories about how it should have been in light of all that have been happening around, and in the light of the profound resources that it can lay eyes on.

Dennett agrees to the view that,

> "... [t]he normal mind is not beautifully unified, but rather a problematically yoked-together bundle of partly autonomous systems. All parts of the mind are not equally accessible to each other at all times. These modules or systems sometimes have internal communication problems which they solve by various ingenious and devious routes."[65]

This ability of ours to fill in missing information and tell stories is marvellous. Language has been the greatest blessing that we have been endowed with on the way to consciousness. We

[64] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity".
[65] Ibid.

are in a way neuronally hardwired and socially pressurised to present ourselves to others and to us. With the capacity to use language, we have a way of presenting ourselves as though we were stories or telling stories about ourselves just the way we speak of how we understand any other objects in the world. Once this process begins, there is no turning back; it is either continuation of the stories that we have been telling or restructuring of the plot – but we have to, either way. The narration itself takes robust forms once we start playing around with them and mostly goes beyond our conscious controls. In Dennett's words, "for the most part we don't spin them [the stories]; they spin us".[66] But, for the most part, this happens as an unconscious activity, without us ever knowing that our way of relating to and finding our place in the social world is by telling stories.

> *Our* fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is not building dams or spinning webs, but telling stories--and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others--and ourselves--about who we are.[67]

The brain initially and for most part is not aware that it is writing a novel just like a spider does not know it has to spin. Just as the spider is set up to build webs without ever sitting down to plan out or structure how to web, we just keep telling stories. Dennett claims that "... *we*, (unlike *professional* human storytellers) do not consciously and deliberately figure out what narratives to tell and how to tell them; like spider webs, our tales are *spun by us*; our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their *product*, not their *source*."[68] But he goes on to argue that we become conscious of our own stories once we start telling them to ourselves.

In humans this process becomes conscious for the reason that unlike the spiders we also engage in expressing before others what we are experiencing. More than spinning the webs of life we need to present before the world and to ourselves what we have been busy with. Dennett argues that this capacity to be conscious must have happened due to our primitive way of consultation with others and later with ourselves in the absence of others, through loud utterance and audition in the beginning and then through internal communication for intelligible reasons. It is as a deliberate method for seeking clarity from and for our need to represent ourselves to the world that we became conscious. The way we keep telling things to

[66] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 418.
[67] Dennett, "The origins of selves".
[68] Ibid.

ourselves is not an irrelevant work, rather the foundation to what we are, making us what we are, conscious beings.

Just as different drafts of sensory information about the world struggle for attention in the human mind, Dennett argues that there are different accounts of all that we do. Our behaviour does not happen as if in a beautiful symphony, they are rather coined into coherent and consistent narratives - every narrative is our way of making us consistent and unified. He observes,

> ...[i]t does seem that we are all virtuoso novelists, who find ourselves engaged in all sorts of behavior, more or less unified, but sometimes disunified, and we always put the best "faces" on it we can. We try to make all of our material cohere into a single good story. And that story is our autobiography.[69]

The process of creating a mostly unwritten autobiography and getting it unified noticeably demands high efforts for the reason that there might be different accounts of the narrative that an organism makes up about its own behavioural patterns. This must be as natural as different autonomous sections in the ant colony doing their part of the job or the relatively autonomous departments of the human body doing their lot. There could be possibly different accounts of the same body for reason of dis-unification or, rather, it is the way it works. Just as different drafts of sensory inputs struggle for attention and action, Dennett claims, may be that an organism also initially builds up different accounts and then they struggle for attention and execution. We may also note the thoughts of Nietzsche here. He wonders,

> "...perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general? A kind of aristocracy of "cells" in which dominion resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command?"[70]

Just as we cohere the narration into a unified one, an abstract centre around which our whole narration is built up, there could be malfunctioning and different centres of narration. This is nothing metaphysically troubling as we are not talking about the bisection of the self into two. We are rather talking about an abstract concept, an abstract location. Dennett claims that perceiving multiple narrations or selves in one body is nothing metaphysically intriguing. It is the fault with the narration and "...all that has to be the case is that the story doesn't cohere

[69] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity".
[70] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 270.

around one self, one imaginary point, but coheres (coheres much better, in any case) around two different imaginary points."[71] He goes on to argue that this is the case with both, the normal and the pathological. Only that in the case of the normal, the main narration is solid enough to keep the others under cover; this unification process or different defence mechanisms, as we have seen in the section on defence mechanisms, does not work in cases of the less fortunate.

Everyone is an author of multiple narratives and the different drafts that have come up as the story of the individual organism fight for prominence and attention. Dennett uses the analogy of the election to the office of the President of the state. Many a candidate is in the fray and the one prominent and thought out to be most fitting for the times and situations get elected. Once elected he behaves as if he was the only candidate and we forget about the others in the contest as he begins to work for all in the name of all. Much in a similar line, "…a human being first creates--unconsciously (the way a spider creates a web)--one or more ideal fictive-selves and then elects the best supported of these into office as her Head of Mind."[72] He seems to present it in a very natural way. The main point to be proved is that there is no given something that we call self or there is anyone who decides and directs as to what should be our story.

In the "Origins of Selves" he very lucidly places the view on the positioning of this major narration that becomes our autobiography, the way we come to express ourselves and be known. He says that initially the human organism comes with no narratives whatsoever; one is all left to fend for herself just like the spider or the weaver. As and when one has enough engagement with the world to relate itself differently with it, various possibilities of selfhood arise. Due to the felt relevance and societal pressures, the organism comes to choose the most convincing, prominent, and appreciated one to be the chief commandant. This might be the reason why we find a trouble in the adolescents about fixing identities. Once selected, it becomes the master, through whose eyes one might then see, through whose mind one might think and act. In cases of MPD, the other drafts might be equally powerful and still struggle to remain relevant and in the thick of action. Dennett argues that these are all possible for the reason of self's being an abstract centre. We can make sense of the psychological disorder of MPD by positing in effect two centres of gravity.

[71] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity".
[72] Dennett, "Origins of Selves".

Once given charge of execution, this abstract narration takes over us, deciding what we see, understand, and act. Thus given a free hand, it grows from strength to strength at every new experience, giving us in return, a sense that there is something continuous inside us that controls us. It becomes so strong that we as a collective race arrange our life, morality and existential aspirations around the myth of this commander, which,

> ...[i]s an abstraction one uses as part of a theoretical apparatus to understand, and predict, and make sense of, the behavior of some very complicated things. The fact that these abstract selves seem so robust and real is not surprising. They are much more complicated theoretical entities than a Center of gravity. And remember that even a Center of gravity has a fairly robust presence, once we start playing around with it. But no one has ever seen or ever will see a center of gravity.[73]

Bruce Hood, taking the example of an optical illusion where four circles with a corner of each cut in such a way that when arranged properly they create the illusion that there is a square in the centre, argues that Dennett's understanding of self is such.[74] The core is an illusion, an assumption that happens because of the surroundings. When the context is removed the square also disappears. In the same way, the illusory notion of self also disappears once the context is taken away.

Dennett in the article "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity" presents self as an abstract centre of gravity. It is an abstraction in the sense that there is nothing as a self to be seen or located even though everyone has a sense that there is one. It is a kind of purposeful and practical fiction that the individual creates. While explaining Dennett's position, Shaun Gallagher expresses it this way. "In the case of narrative gravity, however, an individual self consists of the abstract and movable point where the various stories (of fiction or biography) that the individual tells about himself, or are told about him, meet up."[75] Dennett argues as we have seen before that since the self understood as the center of gravity is an abstraction, it can relocate itself to different places as per situational demands or there could be a logical division of this centre as in the case of MPD. He might be intending to say that the centre of the whole individual shifts to certain areas as relevant and the most appreciated story takes over. Centre of gravity that an individual has, might be different when he is living the role of

[73] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity".
[74] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, Pp. xi –xii.
[75] Gallagher, "Philosophical conceptions of self", p. 19.

a father and the role of an officer. The story of what one is might be emphasizing certain aspects at a particular time, to be replaced by some other at a different time.

Thus, we may conclude Dennett's views on the nature of self by stating in his own words that the narration and the end result of an abstract center is a way of presenting before the world and to ourselves a unified picture of all that we are. The core being part of a persistent and enduring story, might seem real. The different aspects of one's life in normal conditions is squeezed into one narrative that it seems to be in all aspects one person, one unified story and its

> ...[e]ffect on any audience or readers is to encourage them to (try to) posit a unified agent whose words they are, about whom they are: in short, to posit what I call a *center of narrative gravity*. This is yet another abstraction, not a thing in the brain, but still a remarkably robust and almost tangible *attractor of properties*, the "owner of record" of whatever items and features are lying about unclaimed.[76]

Dennett concludes his essay on the self by emphasising again the point that self is an abstraction, a nothing that is to be found, by quoting the famous words of Hume, where he adamantly states that he could find no one within him as the owner of the myriads of thoughts and feelings that make up what he is.

4.5.2 Self as Centre-less Narratives

Dennett has argued form a naturalistic perspective as to how self could be seen similar to a concept in Physics, Centre for gravity, an imaginary point where the weight of a body of matter may be considered to be concentrated. Self, conceived as an abstract centre of narrative gravity, can shift its focus to different points at will by virtue of being an abstract entity. In relation to such an understanding of self, we look at a more concrete and active notion of selfhood in Paul Ricoeur who perhaps can be considered one of the earliest champions of narrative understanding of selfhood in the continental tradition. Ricoeur's notion of self can be called a *capable self,* as it is the notion of an agent-self who is capable of acting, recounting, and imputing. It has been considered more elaborate and accommodative than that of Dennett.

[76] Dennett, "The origins of Selves".

Ricoeur does not take "self" to be a metaphysical entity, but appreciates the possibility of selfhood, which is an intersubjectively constituted capacity that individual human persons can have for agency and self ascription.[77] Selfhood necessarily involves the seizing of oneself as an agent of concrete actions, as a "who", and it is in interpreting in narrative terms or in creating sense of the action that an individual identity arises.

> ... [t]his impetus is transformed into action only through a decision whereby a person says: Here I stand! So narrative identity is not equivalent to true self-constancy except through this decisive moment, which makes ethical responsibility the highest factor in self-constancy. … It is at this point that the notion of narrative identity encounters its limit and has to link up with the nonnarrative components in the formation of an acting subject.[78]

Ricoeur's notion of self is socially and morally located. It is in decisive moments of taking and committing oneself to a moral stand that one's selfhood is defined. Selfhood is also an intersubjective affair and is always defined culturally and socially that "...[t]he selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought without the other".[79] Though the actions speak for themselves as they are set within the constraints of ethical judgements, there is always an element of interpretation involved in it. Interpretation is not only for the other, but also for oneself, in trying to make sense of the action. Narrative interpretations are made necessary also by the non-availability of one's self for knowledge.

Ricoeur proposes that the active role of the agent should also take an interpretative element into it for becoming a narrative person. Ricoeur does not consider selfhood to be a sufficiently intelligible question because of the impossible oneness that is demanded of the knower and the known. Satisfactory answer cannot be reached at when the question is about the identity of the questioner himself. While asking who am I, the *I* cannot escape being in the seat of the seeker, himself falling within the stipulated domain of enquiry, ending up being both the seeker and the thing that is being sought. Knowledge of me, like every other knowledge, is mediate and calls for interpretation; the introspective method of immediacy cannot be appreciated. Being fallible entities, we are never "immediate" to ourselves.

I as a knower is not an objective reality that has to be discovered, but something that has to be achieved, created and attested to. Individual person is not merely a story teller or one

[77] Atkins, "Paul Ricoeur", *IEP*.
[78] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative III*, p. 249.
[79] Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, p. 3.

about whom a story is said, but he "appears both as a reader and the writer of its own life".[80] Ricoeur shows how emplotment configures an event into a story while describing the three-stage *mimesis* and emphasizes the role of the reader. Plot for an action that happens in the objective world is created by the author and is read and interpreted by the reader. The author is a reader too. Not only both the *interpreter* and the *interpreted*, the same individual is also the *recipient* of the interpretations.

> Self-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation; the latter borrows from history as well as from fiction, making a life story a fictional history or, if one prefers, a historical fiction, interweaving the historiographic style of biographies with the novelistic style of autobiographies.[81]

Our life stories are to be not only "written," but they must also be "read"; and when they are read, they are taken as one's own and integrated into one's identity and self understanding.[82] Thus, the active agent of Ricoeur remains in the thick of actions, interprets it and makes plans for the future. And the future is well incorporated into the schema of things that an individual prepares for herself. Identity can be considered more than mere description or commitment to any moral stance. We are more than what actually we are. In defining what one is, further specks of imagination - projections and ideals - are added to the existence of an active agent. The agent thus becomes both historical and fictional. Whatever we are, serves as the realistic foundation for identity constitution and identity formulation demands that I take into consideration the part of me that I am not yet, me as projected into the future or the ideal me. Narratives thus stand between natural description and ethical prescription.

Ricoeur's narrative account of selfhood is relevant even more today also for the inclusiveness that it allows. While looking at the development of autobiographical selves, we had seen how inconsistencies and contradictory nature of persons are tackled, and Ricoeur's account well includes them all.

> At a psychological level, this view allows for conflict, moral indecision and self- deception, in a way that would be difficult to express in terms of an abstract point of intersection. Furthermore, with respect to neurological models, this extended model is even more consistent than Dennett's abstract center with the concept of distributed processing, and with

[80] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative III,* p. 246.
[81] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 114.
[82] Atkins, "Paul Ricoeur", *IEP*.

> what Gazzaniga describes as the mixing of fact and fiction by the left-hemisphere 'interpreter'.[83]

Narratives are balancing acts between harmony and dissonance. This gives space for all the inconsistencies that one has to face in the making of one's narration consistent and coherent. Narrative identity is inclusive, having space for concordance and discordance within. It also contains unity and plurality - both synchronous and diachronous. Thus, we may say that the narrative account of Ricoeur is more inclusive and broad than that of Dennett and his views on selfhood is in line with the findings in cognitive science.

> We may extend Ricoeur's model beyond what he takes to be a unified life narrative and suggest that the self is the sum total of its narratives, and includes within itself all of the equivocations, contradictions, struggles and hidden messages that find expression in personal life. In contrast to Dennett's center of narrative gravity, this extended self is decentered, distributed and multiplex.[84]

Ricoeur argues selfhood to be neither abstract nor mere animal self-awareness - it is both realistic and fictitious. Ricoeur conceives of the narrative self, not as an abstract point at the intersection of various narratives, but as something richer, more substantial and concrete.[85] Narrative identities neither assume the existence of nor accept a complete denial of an indubitable "I".

> Without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antinomy with no solution. Either we must posit a subject identical with itself through the diversity of its different states, or, following Hume and Nietzsche, we must hold that this identical subject is nothing more than a substantialist illusion, whose elimination merely brings to light a pure manifold of cognitions, emotions, and volitions.[86]

Though there seems to be some differences in the two accounts, we could also see them as complementary. While Dennett's account can be seen as one that depicts the self as it is at any given point of time and that of Ricoeur as how the self is being made at every given moment. In the following sections, we will look at the notion of self as a process, a narrative continuum that goes on uncompleted incessantly.

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[83] Gallagher, "Philosophical conceptions of self", p. 20.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative III*, p. 246.

4.6. Self-beings as Narrative Continuums

We have seen in the previous sections how narratives enhance minimal self's transforming into self-beings, and how the human brain with its highly complex neuronal mechanisms makes it possible. We looked at the naturalistic explanation proposed by Antonio Damasio as to how the autobiographical-self-making-process begins from the felt feelings of the lived body and ends up enriching the narrative interpretations of the way the body lives in the world. After looking at the neuronal mechanisms that work out the much needed cohesion and consistency in our narratives in the section on defence mechanisms, we moved on to understand the nature of this self from a naturalistic point of view, as explained by Dennett. We sort of looked at the narrative account of self in Ricoeur too to widen the scope of our understanding. In this section I will try to put together an account of the self-being taking into account different aspects involved in the formation of one, especially looking at the issues of unity and continuity of self. It would be narrated metaphorically and insights from different thinkers will be taken into account.

We have argued in the chapter that narrations do not create selves, but enhance minimal selves' evolution into self-beings, temporal persons. Narrative mechanisms are important in that they help us organise and interpret our histories, and locate it into the social history. And while discussing about various pathologies of the self, we saw how various self-enhancing processes can go awry too. Can we look at the larger philosophical problems of self in the light of these? How does narration provide temporality to the basic phenomenal experiences of the organism that seems otherwise unrelated and incomplete? How are the experiences marked as happening to the same individual? Even when narrative accounts of the self seem to be interesting, the bigger philosophical problems refuse to step back.

Our narrative capacity to thread history and future into the present and propose them as consistent stories might be another reason for the continuity and stability of self-beings and for the sudden jump in human evolution. Providing meaning and relevance to the seemingly unrelated experiential life of humans would not have been possible without our capacity to narrate. Self-knowledge is a topic that makes explicit the limitations of our language and understanding that we are forced into talking in metaphors. A self-being is spun off the threads of one's memories, ideas, beliefs or opinions, body and its emotions, material possessions, relations, social positions, and whatever is connected to our world, as though it was a woollen piece. It is a fact that,

> [m]ost adults develop a more or less standard life-narrative that effectively defines the self in terms of a particular series of remembered experiences. These accounts are continually being extended (and occasionally revised!), creating a narrative structure much like that of more formal autobiographies.[87]

Our self-concept might be like a yarn of woollen strands, all different in colour, texture and size but loosely intermingled that we take the long yarn to be one (single and identical) for every practical purpose. There might not be any single long string running from the beginning till the end; not even our body cells endure. Every strand joins others at some point in time and ends at another in the long journey; one may not necessarily begin where another ends. There might be one catching up with another as though in a relay running or there might be a few walking along like friends on a long trip. There could also be strands ending and starting at different time locations without any direct relation and leaving gaps in-between to be filled in by the larger narration. Some of the strings running along could be really thick, while some small, some long and some short. While some of the strands could be irremovably intermingled while some stand or forced to stand separate without getting largely involved and might fall off practically into oblivion. What matters is how narrative mechanisms work to unite them all and present as though it is a beautifully woven single piece of art.

Let us look at the origins. Infants might begin with a single thread of embodiment with unrelated strands of emotions and perceptions joining it later. We have seen in previous chapters how these come together to form initial mental content and begin the long journey of forming self-concepts. As the individual grows, myriads of strands are stuck to the initial strings. Many of them get entangled to the original, some of them remain independent and less prominent, some of them function as connection strings, some persist with bright colours while some fade away, some might get untied and fall away or join with different cords, and finally what we have is mostly a dominant yarn with strands of different colours and nature cohered into it, some sticking out and falling apart from the external and many withering away or getting squeezed into less prominence inside. The first strand we might understand as the minimal self and the other strands as the core self ingredients, formed out of the minimal self's engagement with the world and itself. Every thought and change that the engagement produces sticks to the collection of strings that the individual has come to

[87] Neisser, "Five Kinds of Self Knowledge", p. 397.

become. And the process of autobiographying can be understood as the rearranging and fitting of them into a single unified account in the long run.

One way to think about it is to imagine the self as being constructed like a spider's web, but without the spider, each string representing an influence pulling on the overall structure. The self is the resulting pattern of influences, beliefs and behaviours that compete for attention, pulling together, trying to find a common ground. The stronger strands may be metaphors used to describe the cardinal traits that define personality, snapping of which, the shape of the web becomes distorted. This might echo the narrative account of self, described by Dennett, where the fight is for prominence and for finding an abstract centre among all the influences and diversities. The infantile life could be considered a phase of constructing the webs of influence, where it has not yet established ways of offsetting the strong impulses that fight to take over. The arrangements of strands are self-organizing for the fact that they are competing. There need not be a self at the centre of the web holding it together.[88] The outcome, the sense of being an enduring self, is the imagined subject of these mental activities.

> I would say that if one is awake and there are contents in one's mind, consciousness is the result of adding a self-function to mind that orients the mental contents to one's needs and thus produces subjectivity. The self function is not some know-all homunculus but rather an emergence, within the virtual screening process we call mind, of yet another virtual element: an imagined *protagonist* of our mental events.[89]

It is difficult to understand the nature of the protagonist as it is an imagined protagonist of the mental events – a fiction written about the mental events. It is not often a reliable entity about whom any kind of positive study can be made possible. It is a dynamic concept, reframed and redefined at every demanding occasion. "Consciousness offers a direct experience of mind, but the broker of the experience is a self, which is an internal and imperfectly constructed informer rather than an external, reliable observer",[90]we may assume. And Psychological theories of personality do not say much about the individuals – the theories are rather general. Every person has something to offer for everyone, every situation and in this sense, all are alike and the theories speak nothing much special about the individuals.

[88] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 80.
[89] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, p. 166.
[90] Ibid., p. 177.

On the other hand, from a commonsensical point of view, we may be tempted to think that there is an essence of a person as revealed by the psychological tests of personality. The results are often unique and the cardinal traits would tell us what a person is. But the interesting fact is that, our stories are so complex that the same subject can produce five different results on the same test if conducted from five different contexts.[91] This simply goes to support the narrative model of Paul Ricoeur, where different centres of narration might pop up into prominence. Also interesting is the case of Identity Dissociation Disorder, wherein different selves or protagonists exist within the same person, in the same story plot but unknown to each other.

We take notice of the extreme cases of MPD to argue that there could be different narratives within a single organism initially and it is one of them that gets to become the dominant one, in normal cases. The fight goes on between different draft narratives that the body is in the process of building, for being selected as the robust idea that all other narratives can cling on to – a chieftain of all. Once a narrative is selected as the commander, as proposed in the theory of Dennett,[92] all out attempts are made to make consistent every existing and upcoming thoughts and actions to the will and wish of the chief narration.

Noticing the troubles the adolescents have about finding and settling their identity also gives us some kind of idea as to what a process we come through. Though individuals might behave as though they were multiple individuals occupying single human bodies as seen in cases of MPD, amnesic to the other personalities existing within,[93] we have discussed this to be nothing metaphysically problematic. Could we be asking if we were one or many? Though it seems that there is not just one me, but many – depending on the roles and situations that a person with MPD plays out – the fact remains that they are different aspects of the same individual, different aspects of the narrative getting switched into action alternatively in a multi-social-world. It is the external world that switches us from one character to another. We are a reflection of the situations–we exist as the reflection of those around us.[94]

The different narratives or the strings do not come to dominate at a single point in time for the reason that once the prominent one among them takes the charge over, others usually end up having peripheral or relational existence. Their identity would be seen through the light of

[91] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. 174.
[92] Dennett, "The Origins of Selves"
[93] Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind*, p. 123.
[94] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. xiii.

the major narrative, either to be accepted and incorporated or to be rejected and despised. The seeming consistency provided to our behaviour and mental life can be accounted through such understandings of the self-concept-constitution. This might be another reason that we do not get counted, in normal cases, as running parallel narratives strong enough to count us as different persons as in the cases of MPD.

We will also call to mind the proposal in Neisser that once formed, the conceptual self functions as a theory of mind,[95] and sieves every fresh data coming in from the lived world and constantly works out cohesion and consistency with the existing mental life. We also remember the role of the neuronal mechanisms and the different parts of the brain that are involved in making the narrative unitary and consistent as discussed in section on "Malleable self-concepts and Consistent Narratives". Various defence mechanisms are positively used by the brain to repress and remove inconsistencies in experiences and thoughts from conscious engagement in the presently lived life, thus making the whole concept of unconscious really significant in the understanding of self function.

Ramachandran assumes that this process of making our self-concept consistent and united must be assisted by the left hemisphere of the brain.

> "In order to generate coherent actions, the brain must have some way of sifting through this superabundance of detail and of ordering it into a stable and internally consistent "belief system" – a story that makes sense of the available evidence. Each time a new item of information comes in we fold it seamlessly into our preexisting worldview. I suggest that this is mainly done by the left hemisphere."[96]

The personal unconscious has rather unrecognised significance in the formation of unique self-notions. Self-formation is not only about connecting remembered past with future projects and making it a linear stream of thought, but also for all that large chunk of memories that we are not aware of. Carl Jung in line with the understanding of the collective unconscious also believed in a personal unconscious developed out of the unpleasant and repressed elements of the person's conscious mind to exist in each individual. The individual would gradually come in contact with *personal unconscious* and incorporate it into her self-concept, he argued.

[95] "My notion of what I am, like your notion of what you are, reflects a cognitive model embedded in a theoretical network. ... Like other concepts it tends to govern what I notice; in this case, what I notice about myself." (Neisser, "Five Kinds of Self-knowledge", p. 401.)
[96] Ramachandran and Blakeslee. *Phantoms in the Brain, p.* 134.

> Psychologically healthy people were said to gradually come into contact with the unconscious parts of their personalities, integrating the unconscious or "shadow" side with their "conscious ego." In this way all major components of the personality could eventually work in concert to form a fully realised, purposeful self. This process of harmonising one's conscious and unconscious components happened in a unique way for each person, he said, and led to a unique pattern of behaviour. Jung called this process *individuation*; he saw it as the means by which each of us becomes an individual distinct from others.[97]

The memories and emotions suppressed into the unconscious, never wishing to be known, also form images to constitute us. And it might be an impossibility to recall or represent all that we are to others or to oneself. The dormant portion of the self constituting aspects, or the *personal unconscious*, might be lying low, probably working to produce a fitting solid background, which on most recent and relevant aspects of the self get projected at any particular given situation, or on which colourful pictures of the self are drawn. Much of these rise to the fore at the most opportune moment, implying various social roles that one adorns. Jung, unlike his predecessors, considers personality to have two centres. He calls ego the centre of one's conscious identity, and uses the notion Self to cover the entire aspect of one's personality that includes consciousness, the unconscious, and the ego. The Self is both the whole and the centre. While the ego is a self-contained little circle off the centre contained within the whole, the Self can be understood as the greater circle.[98]

Imagine a sea of light lumination where a chain of colourful lights shine for a moment and then gives way to another chain. All of them exist, but one or the other gets prominence at a moment. The rapidity and the context give us the impression that every one of the lighting chains is part of the bigger one; the boundaries could be undefined. This might be the case with us as well. We may be shining certain aspects and holding the major portions back as a background.

> The vast unconscious probably has been part of the business of organizing life for a long, long time, and the curious thing is that it is still with us, as the great subterraneam under our limited conscious existence.[99]

But we never get to comprehend the complete picture of the vast underlying compound that provides base to the transient self-concepts that we consider ourselves to be all about. This

[97] Morgan and King, *Introduction to Psychology*, Pp. 584-85.
[98] Franz, "The process of individuation", p. 208.
[99] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, p. 175.

underlying structure can positively be considered as an ancient structure upon which the fresh narratives can be built upon. Studies on the history of human evolution suggest that the strategies involved in forming images and selecting and acting upon the most valuable ones began to evolve long before there was consciousness, just as soon as enough images were being made, perhaps as soon as real minds first bloomed.[100]

The most prominent images had been struggling for action and response on the part of the body even before consciousness began. In our ability to narrate these relevant and powerful images we must be just making them explicit, which had been working unconsciously earlier. Narration might also be relevant in that it focuses upon certain images at any given time with major portions of our life remaining hidden only to surface at different occasions. Human person is like a dynamic yarn moving around twirling and twisting, expressing the myriads of its hue and texture. The yarn could be very sturdy and firm, or decayed and lucid, it could all be beautiful or ugly – no one gets to see the core. What the world gets to know in the exterior are but controlled expressions, and that too from limited perspectives. The interesting factor about the strands is that they do not get faded by overuse, rather they become colourful and powerful with persistent usage. It is the ones not used often that fade into oblivion, sometimes to be retrieved later at some occasion, either automatically or intentionally.

The self constitutive elements at the bottom of the act are different in nature and intensity. The common link among them has to be deciphered and they all have to be coded into one large narrative. It is a fact that "...down at the bottom, the simple conscious mind is not unlike what William James described as a flowing stream with objects in it."[101] But objects in the stream are not equally salient. Some are magnified and others are not. The cohesion between different strands might also be made possible by the narration method that humans apply. The unity of consciousness could be possible for the reason of agency and ownership existing at the bottom and giving that particular commonness to different threads of images used for knitting our narration.

Coming to the problem of agency and unity in self, we might ask the question as to how do different strings get entangled together to form themselves into a long intermingled cord. The problem could be framed as how two distinct experiences are perceived as happening simultaneously to one organism and how two distinct experiences happening at two different

[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., p. 184.

time locations are experienced as having happened to the same individual. This problem has traditionally been dealt with from the perspectives of linear time narratives. We see the trouble of explaining the relation between two ants in the row of ants,[102] or how fleeting impressions and ideas in the mind are perceived to be continuous,[103] or how the stream of consciousness is made possible. The problem of unity of consciousness in regard to self-concept has been the relation existing between the individual ants in a row or flames in a chain. How each of them is related to the other? If self were to be formed of the experiences, beliefs and memory being one after another, we will never be able to solve the problem as such.

We could also understand narratives to be happening in not only many parallel lines but also each one crossing into the territory of the other at certain points or sharing major chunks of the narratives in common. Thus it may not be a brick lane where one is preceded and succeeded by other bricks. The secret might be in the different tales that we have about us. We can easily shed a few and gain a few at any phase in life and still remain seemingly the same, but ever changing. And we should also call to mind the large repository of personal unconscious that we discussed earlier working to provide a fitting unseen background on which beautiful stories can be etched.

The concept of time is important in narration as the very function of narration is to provide temporality and continuity to the subjective and fleeting experiences and thoughts of the individual. In the cyclic notion of time, wherein the past is encompassed into the structure and the present and the future are built on it, seems to better fit the needs of narration. As seen in the section on the importance of defence mechanisms in the making of the self, we see that many aspects of our life, either less significant or contradictory to the schema that we have developed, are left out. Even when the past is included, we keep the boundaries of the narratives undefined and flexible, so that the dendrites of the narration, even if that means of the unconscious, to extend into large areas of the life-world. Narrations might find difficulty with linear understanding of timing in finding a unifier for the stream of consciousness that, to certain extent, perturbs the Buddhist notion of person as well. This lineal understanding

[102] "...the 'I' is posited to explain that the felt unity among the inner states, when that feeling of unity can instead be explained by appeal to our cognitive limitations: there seems to us to be a single thing, the row of ants, only when we look from afar." (Sidrits, et. al., (eds.) *Self, No Self*. p. 6.)

[103] To ourselves we appear to be merely "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (Hume (1739/1888), *A Treatise of Human Nature,* 1.4.6, p. 252.)

has to be clearly distinguished from the Buddhist understanding of persons wherein a person is understood as the persistent presence of flames moment after moment. In narratives the events and memories are not compartmentalised and joined together. This might be the reason for its being unified as though it was something permanent and enduring.

Peripheral perspective on the nature of self has advantage over the frontal perspective in that it gives us ideas about how agency works to provide unity and continuity to the self-concepts that we form. It is a continuous process, wherein the self-constitutive elements intermingle and march forward, getting sewed into each other and provide continuity and consistence. Regular editing, by means of defence mechanisms or narration, does not present challenges to the self-notion, looked at from this perspective. Agency might be the real force behind why we continue to be unified agents and subjects of the world.

We could look at actions as sprouting from either the peripheral or from the core of what we are. The simple act of a casual utterance could be peripheral and circumstantial and would just be another thread on the whole yarn of narration, unnoticed and hanging from the peripheral. Another act, may be, of charity could be stemming from the core of one's being altruistic in nature. The action can sprout from the very core but not having much impact on the narrative, sticking again on the peripheral but having roots in the core. But another act of charity with long term commitment could be an action that sprouts from the very core of our being and becoming an important aspect of our narrative, running along for a long time. The narrative can become thicker and gain additional identities, for example that of being a generous sponsor. Newly developed deep relations with the sponsored in the example, the narrative can become extended as well – another narrative (another person's) gets joined with ours.

It could happen with our mental life too. Any new idea can enlarge and extend our narratives. A casual but a wise suggestion could be a temporary event in one's narrative but it can get extended into her life and can prove even a course changer. A daring idea can become an identity for one, staying with the individual lifelong, transforming the way one is known – a long, thick, and shining string is added to the yarn of one's narrative. And in all probability, it will produce and add other strings to it in the long run, making the narrative all the more denser and robust. Thus, agency of thought or agency of action goes on to build sense of ownership and the concept of an agent that we abstract from the body actions and believed to exist distinct from the material body might get rock-solid in the process. In the meanwhile,

we possibly assimilate a lot from the external world that the boundaries of the self-being remain open to addition and modification. Self-being could be one without defined boundaries as what we count as mine and consider as part of us, get extended constantly.

A person has to be identified as one living in a society of volition and action as Mohanty opines:

> "... a person is different from a living organism as well as from a centre of consciousness, although she is both. As a living organism, a person is self-maintaining, self-moving, self-reproducing; as a centre of consciousness, a person knows, represents, thinks. But as a person, while being all these things, she acts, judges, demands, has rights, entertains rules, is in connection with other individuals and their acts, judgements, evaluations, rights, and values. The living space of a person is not a field of objects, but an actual and valuational field of situations which constantly overtake her, and in which she is called upon to make new decisions, and from within which she projects new possibilities for her being."[104]

We have seen elsewhere earlier that neither of our sensory inputs, memory, or narration is stable and trustworthy and therefore our self-concepts formed based upon them are illusory in nature. It may be the fact that we are not what we think we are, after all those self deceptions and defence mechanisms are called into duty. Even then, our narrations might remain relatively stable and reliable for many reasons, as experienced in everyday life. Narratives are something that we ascribe to ourselves and should be covered under the immunity of first person ascription. Moreover, self-narratives cannot be taken for pure fictions. We are not ontological fictions but metaphysical illusions - it is the way we understand, not the way we are. What I create is a self-concept – what I think I am; and not a self – I will never be able to create an ontological self-being.

Even in cases of self-deception, we do our best to make our actions consistent with the image that we present. Moreover, individuals believe that they are what they think they are, for the reason that our narratives are testified by reliable witnesses and warranted by authorities. Somewhere or the other, the narratives have to meet realistic standards of living. The pressures and influences of the external world demand stability and consistency of self-notions as well. They are in the constant process of getting approved or disproved. The world easily identifies inconsistencies in what we narrate about ourselves – this, in turn, works as a stimulating factor for us to believe what majority in our world accept. This might also answer

[104] Mohanty, *The Self and its Other*, p. 82.

our constant inclination towards getting the approval of others on our narratives – eagerness to listen to what others speak of us.

We are in the constant process of making convincing autobiographies not only for others but for ourselves as well. Regular changes are incorporated into the whole narration, making the output acceptable and consistent. The changes often remain minimal and in majority of cases they happen in a very slow and unnoticeable way that neither the person nor those related notice, unless in cases of life-transforming events. This loathness to change and the slothfulness in action might give the individual an impression that he does not change. But the changes are a fact and it might be unending too.

4.7. Autobiographical Selves: Published Authors in Charge or Unpublished Co-authors in progress?

When speaking about autobiographical selves, it is right to ask about the extent of autonomy that the author enjoys in the whole process, all the more when the author is the protagonist as well. While discussing the social dimensions of the self, we noticed how our narratives are coined into bigger narratives and squeezed into predetermined plots in covert ways. Even in such constrained spaces, do our narratives become autonomous as far as the author's efforts are considered? It seems we are but co-authors and co-editors as far as the contribution of others are considered towards the narration. We will look at these peripheral aspects of narration in this section.

No one creates a narrative in isolation for the reason that it is not a fiction. It is a historically and socio-culturally located effort and has to take into account larger narratives in which it is demanded. My self-narrative is hampered or enriched by the narratives that others tell of me or the social and political timings into which I am positioned. It is the tale of a community, in which each individual is given the charge of a chapter where she plays the protagonist.

> We are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives... In life, as both Aristotle and Engels noted, we are always under certain constraints. We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making.[105]

[105] Mcintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 213.

Situated into a pre-existent meta-narrative, each does not merely play one's roles as Shakespeare imagined. The struggle to find one's voice in mostly determinant larger plots, the efforts to find a place for oneself, and to bring unexpected and needed twist to the larger story at times all define persons. Self-creation is more than writing the story; it is about how one perceives the existing narrative and responds to it by chiselling out one's role in it. The author is born into a plot and the protagonist has to build upon whatever is given. The social and biological constraints dictate most of the storyline. Chapters are sometimes added by persons related. The freedom here is to accept it or not, and to make permissible changes.

> The story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships… what I am, therefore, is a key part of what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present.[106]

Part of what we are is already written even before a stage was set for our entry. The past has been made deterministic and narrations were already doing the rounds and people were already plotting the course of action that the to-be-born auto-biographer would probably tread through. We must note that "...my own present self-understanding is very much a product of these narratives – and in this sense, the present self that I understand myself to be is shaped by stories that others have told prior to my existence. Part of my narrative self-identity thus predates my existence."[107] Thus, we are born with a great part of our narratives written and a large part of our plot is set. We rarely get chance to be the sole author.

The society has a right over our biography for the reason that they are essential co-authors as well. A large chunk of our self-image is told by others or brought to our attention by the communities that we engage with and are accepted with felicity or dejection. There is no way to refrain from the attributions beyond a point of self-defence and self-deception. More than through introspection, it is through inference and testimony that we come to form the narrative that we confidently put up as our own creation. We at times even add references like, "some people say that I am so and so..." and get ourselves confused like, "but I don't think that I am that ...". Here we are adding to our narratives those chapters that others have written but into which we often put in lot of effort. We humbly accept that "...I am not the

[106] Ibid., Pp. 205-06.
[107] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 36.

sole author of the narratives through which I understand myself. My self-understanding is largely shaped by the narratives of other authors".[108] All that we get is to be co-authors.

> We use groups, possessions, tasters, politics and preferences to create the self – an individual that is different. At least, that is the story of self-formation in the West; other cultures provide a different framework that shapes a different type of self. Even hermits and outcasts from society are defined by their rejection of the principles that the rest of us accept. But whether we are distancing our self from the herd, or ingratiating our self as part of the herd, it is the existence of others that defines who we are.[109]

We at times deliberately draw excessively from the narratives of the social group to frame our own identity. This would lead to the most relevant aspect of self today – the politics of identity. Language, region, gender, race, religion, political ideologies all become identity constituents in the easiest intelligible terms. Any political talk of identity has to deal with this issue of our being co-authors rather than sole authors of our narratives. The loss of autonomy over self-narration could do harm not to the particular individual alone but to the entire society as well, more for the communities opposed to the one that individuals draw inspiration from.

Most often what we get to be is an editor not an author. We sit down rarely to write our images. Mostly what we do is to sit at the judgment seat to decide if what we hear others telling about us is true. We keep sieving the material through the image that we think we are. We become narrators only when filling in the missing links or adding additional colouring to what we think we are. "Processes of self-understanding are in this way irreducibly social, culturally embedded affairs. And the self, as narrative construction, is thus dialectically linked with otherness."[110] Or it happens more explicitly while trying to present before others an image of us that we are really not. It is in matters of self-deception and public lying that we in all true sense become authors of a self-image. This image sometimes remains as masks of ours before us and if goes unchecked and approved by those who matter, we might also proceed to believe it to be a part of our true self.

More than authors we may be interpreters and editors of what is mainly written already, our work is to justify what is written and to modify. Though the past slips away from our hand

[108] Ibid.
[109] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. xiii.
[110] Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience", p. 36.

every moment, we are in the process of interpreting it in new lights, trying to justify or rationalise the past. Though the past is beyond repair, the subjective way of looking at it and re-interpreting it never ceases. Narratives are more about the past than about the future – our fictions are historical and autobiography-ing is the interpretation and rereading of the history - reminding ourselves and others of it continually.

> We cannot undo those parts of our pasts that are determinate, but our selves are constantly being made more determinate as we go along in response to the way the world impinges on us. Of course it is also possible for a person to engage in auto-hermeneutics, interpretation of one's self, and in particular to go back and think about one's past, and one's memories, and to rethink them and rewrite them.[111]

We are always into the process of self-hermeneutics, interpreting, modifying and revising at times our own stories to make them consistent and convincing for others and for ourselves. The process goes on until certain secrets of our own are buried along with the bodies that once harboured them. The past as presented to me, the past that I have perceived, the past that I have created, and the past that I was forced to surrender to all come in for review and seek justification before the court of one's own reflective consciousness and of course before the public.

We also behave like editors for the reason that we also sit at the judgement seat with a theory of mind, that is the self-image that we have of our own, to decide if all that is being told about is to be accepted and made part of the work or to be rejected and defended against. Society also decides the facticity of what we narrate and testify or disprove it. Here we are not even given the autonomy to the editors as well. We are cornered into being co-editors.

Since we are looking at the nature of the narrative self, we may take the freedom to ask philosophically trivial questions like the nature of the narrative's publishing. We have seen above that we do not get to be sole authors in charge of the narrating process. But do we get to be published authors either?

Much of what is completed in the process gets published either simultaneously or within a short timeframe. The interesting thing is that the more they get published there is more pressure for rewriting and editing. Others not only suggest changes but feed you with readymade write-ups. It is constant editing. Unlike a printed material it also gets manipulated

[111] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity".

and changed when published to a third or fourth person. The writing, re-writing, editing, defending, hermeneutics all happen simultaneously. And the process goes on. We never get completely narrated nor published. A number of secrets will travel along with us to the tomb that the world never knew about us, and we may go believing many lies about ourselves and never knowing many truths that the world knew about us.

The narration never gets completed. Growing into adulthood from adolescence and then to old age, we are writing and rewriting what we are. "That process of constructing the self does not end with childhood. Even as adults we are continually developing and elaborating our self illusion."[112] Someone else probably continues it or people wish it to be continued. Though we have argued that individuals are narrations or autobiographical selves made conscious, we might put it other way in the light of what we have discussed here. Individuals cannot be understood as a thing since one is neither completely published nor would ever finish with the narration process. We might say that the individual is a process rather than a product. Man is not an autobiography but a process of autobiography-ing.

We never ever get completely written and completely published. Every one of us needs someone close to us or even paid artistic minds to frame a beautiful punch line to end the narrative that we have been in the most adamant habit of making – *a line on our tombstone*.

4.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, we were mainly interested in understanding the nature of the autobiographical selves. Since it is intrinsically related to our understanding of its origins, we also looked at the constitutive mechanisms and the processes involved in self-concept formulation. We began the chapter by looking at the constitutive significance of narratives and argued that narratives do not constitute self, but enhance the minimal selves' transition into temporal selves. To elucidate the process, we looked at how Damasio explains the formulation of autobiographical selves in three stages from a naturalistic perspective, discussing various brain operations, defence mechanisms and interpretative methods involved in making the narration process coherent and consistent.

We discussed Dennett's ideas on the nature of self as abstract centers and expanded its scope by calling in the understanding of Paul Ricoeur to include the peripherals and the challenging

[112] Hood, *The Self Illusion*, p. xiii.

influences that are involved in human nature. We also tried to explain the issues of the unity and continuity of self-beings by taking into account agency and the interlinking character of various self-constituting elements. We ended the chapter looking at the autonomy that individuals enjoy in locating their narratives into the already existing socio-political narratives and argued that we are mostly given the freedom to be less than co-authors – the reason why the whole affair does not seem to be a strenuous one.

It is an old maxim of mine that when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improvable, must be the truth.

– Sherlock Holmes

Conclusion

Conclusion

Human reason, across various philosophical traditions, has historically exhausted much of its energy in unraveling the mystery surrounding its own nature. And even after centuries of human efforts, every seeker is still born into rich thought traditions, exhaustive intellectual debates, and notably, unresolved philosophical questions as far as the notion of self is concerned. The foremost among them remains the existence of the very causative *thing* of the sense of self. Is there a self? This, being an unresolved intellectual dispute, becomes the first concern in this work too and the first chapter, "Introducing Philosophical Debates on the Existence and Nature of Self", tries making sense of the historical debates on this, categorizing them roughly into substantial, non-substantial and no-self theories.

Is there a self?

There is an experiential dimension to my existence as an individual entity – a *mine*-ness towards everything mine: every thought penned in here, every moment of struggle and inspiration gone into the preparing of this, and every moment of dream and happiness associated with it, is irrefutably *mine*. Even if I were to intellectually prove that *I* wasn't there, I as the arguer remains a cross witness, negating all that has been proven, by way of my own very existence. The edifice of modern philosophy has been built upon this certainty that *I, as a subject*, has to be, even to think of my nonexistence. I as the thinking thought refuses to vanish. I can never conceive of myself without the thought that *I am*. Let my existence be momentary or legendary, the sense that *I* exist and that *I* had been and will be *me* is undeniable.

If there is anything in the world, and if there are beings capable of subjectively experiencing that, then there bound to be selves as we saw in the discussion on the concept of minimal pre-reflective selves in the second chapter (Section 2.3). It must be acknowledged that there is something in the world than nothing – idealism has lost its sheen - and a person stripped off of everything, leaving to itself the bare subjectivity of experiencing the world, proves that there are selves too. There is a difference between the rat and the rock. Even infants, who have no knowledge of their past or future nor any reflective awareness of themselves are subjects of experiences - in the fullest connotation of the term "subject" - being capable of experiencing their world in a unique first-person way. But, in regular usage, by selves, we mean something larger – often persons, who are located into histories with plans for the

future and having notions of themselves being in such states of existence, individuals with reflective consciousness.

When survival prospects are considered, there is remarkable difference between "being selves" and "being persons with the sense of being selves". This difference is also evident in *normal* individual *persons* and individuals who fail to be persons, lacking either in capacity for reflective consciousness or memory due to physiological anomalies. In chapter three, while discussing various pathologies of the self (section 3.6.), we looked elaborately at unfortunate human conditions where individuals end up being mere phenomenological organisms, unrelated and momentary, and hence ever living in the present-ness - but fully subjects of phenomenological experiences all the while. The reasons could be fading memories, damaged emotional pathways, failure to form new memories, or probably many unknown others.

What do the sick miss? Do they really come to miss an entity that provided continuity and unity to their experience? With damaged physical bodies, have they become broken instruments where the perfection of a soul cannot be displayed, or, have they just lost the physical/mental capacity to register their experiences into beautiful stories of their own? Probably, these instances are openings into the marvelous ways the human organism functions. Any moment an anomalous brain shows up what it is incapable of, is an occasion to speculate what marvel it must silently be doing, in normal cases, to make the bits and pieces of matter feel how they are united to the universe of mass, and different from it with unique ways of being and relating to it. Those unfortunate human conditions make explicit the difference between having a *sense* of self and not having one.

If western philosophical traditions thought their day would be made in the unraveling of this incontestable *sense* of *my* existence, in the East the same sense was thought to be the cause of all human perils and unending existential struggle of births and rebirths. At one end there is the undeniable sense of being a distinct and enduring entity and the promising hope of being able to discover its secrets, and at the other, the exhortation to realize the folly in believing that man *is* - illusory is the nature of human existence. The punch seems to be in taking the *sense of self* for more than what it really is. The error could be identified in considering the undeniable *sense* of being a permanent entity, made possible by the subjectivity of phenomenological experience and the perceived unity and continuity of consciousness, a

proof for the existence of *something* (another being probably!) simple, immortal and an assurer of all those persistent feelings of humanness.

Insights from the analysis of the experiential dimension of self and the concept of minimal self in the second chapter, "Experiential and Relational aspects of Autobiographical Selves", made robust what we arrived at from the discussions on the first problem of self that we started with – the existence of self. By now, we have demarcated two notions of self: the minimal self and the narrative self, the duo marking two extremes of the range of the notion – one, the minimal momentary subjects, co-durable with experience and the other, temporally extended social persons with narrative histories and anticipated future. And we proposed, with the intention of clarifying the terms, a new term "self-being" to demarcate temporal persons from minimal selves and defined it as "individuals *having* the *sense* of being selves". The sense of self is undeniable and we have seen that there is some difference between *being* selves (organisms capable of experiencing) and *being and having the sense of being* selves. Defining the notions wisely might dissolve the debate on the existence of self.

After looking at the historical debate on the existence of self (Section 1.4.1), the experiential dimension of the sense of self (Section 2.3), the origins of self-concept (Section 2.5), and pathologies of the self (Section 3.6), we concluded that self is not a thing to be found, not even another substantial being within, but the physical organism that is capable of experiencing the world. There are no bodies and selves, but only selves and self-beings. There are differences between beings that have some self-full way of being and those that have not, and between organisms that are capable of *having* experiences of the world in a first person way (minimal selves) and those capable of *consciously owning* those experience as their own (self-beings). The notion of self as a simple, persisting entity is a constructed one, narrated to the world and to oneself, and is possible even in the absence of any entity other than the human body in its purely physical nature.

Having seen that, we moved on to understanding the secrets of the sense of self and the underlying mechanisms constituting it in the third chapter, "Autobiographical Brains: Neurophysiological bases of Self-constitution". We tried understanding the mechanisms that make possible for one to say that "I am stout" instead of "my body is stout". We asked as to what it is of the body that makes it a reflectively conscious thing, more than a known and witnessed object. The opinions of the neuroscientists were called in for assistance. And we saw how the problem of self reflectivity, the second major problem of self discussed in the

work, could possibly be solved if we were able to explain in detail the marvelous network of communication that the central nervous system manages almost autonomously, especially the intra communication system existing within the brain.

Methods of knowing the world are apparently applied in similar manner into knowing the world within too – the communication mechanism within the brain brings to its consideration every output of its own working for interpretation, just the way the external world is reached to its processing units. The thoughts and feelings of the brain might be becoming feed for its own interpretation – mystery of the "self-as-I" becoming the "self-as-me". The loop system of communication within the brain must be the reason for its ability for self-reflection.

It logically led to the concern, if "I were in the brain?" and we concluded that the *I* wasn't *in the brain* or *the brain*, but *I* was *because of* the brain. When I speak of my *self* being in the brain, it is about my *sense* of being a self, the *self-concept* being in there. In chapter three, we also discussed the debate of holism and modularism (Section 3.7) and suggested that *I* am neither in the whole of my brain nor in any particular module of the brain – *I* is but a symphony rising from the churning of billions of neurons, all talking to each other, all dissimilar in their pitches and tones. And the secrets to *my* birth are in the coordination of intricately specialized brain regions, some of them, especially the evolutionarily newer brain regions, contributing more than the others. Another clearer answer to the above question could also be that "I am more out-in-the-world than in-the-brain" as an *agent-being* of actions. There is *nothing* in the brain to be found in the nature of consciousness, which through some mysterious process of interaction becomes conscious of the body and moves it. *I* am to be found in my worlds, moving about deciding the course of survival, appreciating the beauties of life, the rhythm of nature, living its every moment – being a part of it and simultaneously thinking of being distinct off it. I am to be found in a larger frame – in the *society*.

In the second chapter along with the experiential aspect of self, we also looked at the relational aspect of the self (Sections 2.5 and 2.6) – how the self-being is born out of the interface between the biological systems of the body and the socio-cultural web. In its origin, development, and maintenance, a self-concept finds itself, in every sense, deep rooted socially. Every individual is a distinct leaf on the larger narrative that goes on unrelentingly, often, not even pausing much to care about the individuality of persons. The challenge is to frame the leaf beautifully per the specifications of the larger plot that it fits well and becomes

an appreciated part of the ongoing larger narrative – the society has too many unfitting leafs littered about it and they steadily fade into oblivion.

In section 2.5, we saw what it is like to be an infantile organism of experience and how it is initiated into the society and grows to be persons or *self-beings* with well realized choices and web-pulling strings of personality. It is in the presence of others that questions of self become relevant and self-concepts emerge. In Section 3.3, we raised the issue of constructing a sense of self and asserted that it was in reframing the question "who are you?" posed by others into "What am I?" for the mind to ponder upon. Standards of personal identity applied to oneself must be the reason and method for the rise of self-concepts. The entire exercise would have been futile and uncalled for in the absence of persons as identity-question-raisers.

It is in telling the world what we thought we were, or inferred what others thought we were, that we become stories of what we really are, our self-concept emerging – coherent and presentable to the world, and blunting the prick of questions from within. In narrating, after complex arranging and juggling of the output-images of the brain, the outcome of its strenuous meaning making process of what goes on within and between the body (brain included) and its outside world, we present to the world images of the organism and its relation with the world. In narrating we create - not forgetting our argument that narration does not constitute selves but only enhance self-beings. We argued in the light of discussions on the reality of the pre-reflective minimal selves, in section 4.2. that selves cannot be constituted or constructed; they are given and all that is possible through the process of narration is to enhance their becoming into self-beings, beings with concepts of themselves.

We are not ontological fictions; the fiction is only as far the way we understand our nature, not the way we are. What I create is a self-concept – what I think I am; and not a self – none will ever be able to create an ontological self. The becoming of persons with beautifully cohered self-concepts is what narration makes possible – a protagonist is constructed in its own fictions – a realistic fiction though. The neuronal mechanisms underlying and making possible this sense of self was also looked at in section 4.3 with insights from the thoughts of Antonio Damasio. It showed how, from the physiological reports of the relatively permanent internal milieu of the body and the chemical reactions and changes that any interaction with the world/mind enforces upon it, the brain makes sense of its individuality and reality of being subject of experiencing the world. And autobiographical selves are cohered

reports/stories of those changes as happening to a single organism and what it plans to do with those.

We have emphasized repeatedly in the entire work that the notion of self is a constructed one and the real was the biological organism that is capable of experiencing itself and its world and knowing that it does. Narration is its way of telling similar others how it achieves that and how it feels like to. But on deeper analysis in chapter four, "Minimal Self to Self-beings and the Nature of Narrative Selves", we saw how the *auto*biographical selves, that we have come to take ourselves to be, are neither in control nor in direction while framing what we become. What we get to be are co-authors of our own lives (section 4.7), with the weight of plotting shared happily by the significant others around us and the constraints imposed by the biological determinants.

While discussing the development of the infantile organisms' relation with its world and the ways of expressing what they think of that interaction, we saw that they are constrained by their given physiological temperance as well, in choosing what they choose and in reacting how they react. Infants choose from the choice of given worlds to live in and react the way they are tuned. There seems to be not much say left in there with inquisitiveness, shyness, activism, and pleasantness in the infantile nature determining the ways they choose and relate to their worlds and the way the world respond to them. It is finally these interactions that determine the way they frame their world and self-views. We saw in section 2.6. that the society's share in the plotting of the story is bound to be large.

If our self-concept formation is constrained and controlled by the society and the biological givenness, its application is assisted by the psychological defense mechanisms. They have great roles to play in making self-concepts consistent and appreciable, putting to rest everything that goes contrary to the major theme of life that we have come to elect as appreciable. Our thoughts, words and actions all get polished in the inescapable standards of the society through this theme of life that we call, self-concept. We discussed in chapter four (Section 4.4) how various defense mechanisms are called into assistance for making the images and the narrative believable and consistent. Largely healthy, defense mechanisms function almost unconsciously, all to make the output look smooth and polished.

Self-concept formation is also delicate and unreliable for the reason that we may not believe and present to the world what we are, but what we wish to be. Our memories are choosy, we

forget what we dread to remember, exaggerate appreciated thoughts and memories, and often present to the world what it expects of us. The stories that we narrate and the self-concepts that we present are all malleable and modifiable, being built upon fragile memories of varying natures and degrees of likability. The memories of the past and the anticipation for the future get modified to be fit into the narrative that the protagonist author desires to be, and at times the storyline itself gets reworked upon in the face of contradictory evidences coming in. We also looked at the underlying neuronal mechanisms that go into making all these possible and the editorial role played by certain regions of the brain, largely by the left hemisphere and the prefrontal cortex, one easily affected in drunk individuals who are examples of inconsistent stories.

The effort that goes into making the protagonist coherent and likable, in normal cases, is commendable. In cases of grave incoherence and disconnect, the standards get changed too - and the process repeats. The bombardment of information and awareness taken into consideration, our self-concepts and the world-views cannot be but dynamic. And alternate threads of narration that refuse to be docile and struggle to remain what they are, end up occupying a shared body, in what is commonly called multiple personality disorder, a possible situation that normal organisms easily manage otherwise.

Self narration is a spectacular way of placing the memories of yesterday alongside thoughts of today and wishes for the days to come, as belonging to the *same* individual and making this bundle of matter think it is fabulously unique and distinct from the remaining pool of matter. Thanks to the determinative biological given-ness, circuitous social pressures, and unfathomable ways of the human brain, the self-concept-forming process remain largely under the carpet, unconscious – comes to the open only in cases of self-deception and social outwitting, when individuals present themselves contrary to what they *believe* themselves to be. In normal cases, we not only present to the world what we wish ourselves to be, but also come to genuinely believe that we are what we have just presented. Our memories and constituent mechanisms rewire themselves too. The brain, after all its strenuous efforts, needs the senses and critics to be cooperatively inactive in moments of narrative struggles for cohesion.

If we look at selves as given and self-beings as constituted entities, we will have to face another concern as to who decides what should go into the narrative constitution and what not – *who* is *that* that directs the play in the absence of an all knowing entity in the nature of

consciousness? If aspects in narration are emphasized or degraded as per their relevance and particular situation that the narrator is in, there should be an active subject of narration. We looked at the naturalist approach to the problem where it has been argued that it is the result of an autonomous struggle of images for becoming conscious and that there isn't anyone that decides upon what should become conscious. We argued that it could be true of the initial stages of self-concept and consciousness-formation.

Looking figuratively at the process of autobiography-ing/narration, we see that an entire narration depends on the character that is intended to be on display and we assume that similar is the case with self formation too. This could be a *director*-less process, but never a *direction*-less one, except for the time when the experiencing subject was mind-less, having no mental content to be identified as its own. At later stages, the struggle for dominance gets eased with the ascribed relevance each thought and image receives, as belonging to *someone*, a self-being - the protagonist. A self-concept once formed, functions as the measuring rod for all the new incoming experiences and information. Just as a novelist's characters do not jump their behavioral boundaries in any act of thought or expression, so does the protagonist author in matters of making herself up. The game of relating to the world gets a well calculated direction once some form of *mineness* is added to the experiences.

Coming to another major problem of self, unity and continuity that characterize the self-being, we have looked not only within but also around the individual organism. Taking insights from the Jungian psychology and speculations from the labs of neuroscience, we argued that the unity and felt permanence must be results of the enormous unconscious life that lay low to provide a fitting backdrop over which the present story of one's self reflects as though it was a stream of light coming in on a dark sky. Permanence could also be seen as the result of the agentive role that the self-being dons in the social arena. In a connected and related world, where the individual is identified on innumerable measures - among them a few defunct ones mattering naught - spread across on a network of agency and ownership the self-being is deep rooted and forcefully struck into the social arena. For unlocking secrets of the felt unity and permanence of the self-being, not only the chambers of the human brain are to be dung into but the ever expanding social networks that the individual finds herself irremovably in too. The self-being becomes largely a borderless social concept – it narrates to grow in outreach, getting cohesively connected to such other narratives through relations of thoughts, actions or emotions in the process.

The beauty of narrative accounts of the self is that, we can now possibly look around than to above for answers to questions of the world. Understanding self-notions as narrative enterprises also gives us space for incorporating the multi faceted-ness of human nature, its inherent contradictions and tensions; the story becomes all the more important when the characters are presented robust irrespective of the pulls and pressures of being such. This we have discussed while seeing different accounts of narration in the fourth chapter (Section 4.5). It is not in the reporting of what the self-being is but in the *making of it* as what it is, that the human marvel lies and that must be the reason for the impromptu jump in evolution that the human species has witnessed. A substantial being that we thought was the reason for all that we were, for all that were humane, can be retired happily, placing back the burden of *being* and *accounting for* what it is, upon the human body and the world.

But should that degrade man in any form, like the Galilean, Darwinian and Freudian theories did? We haven't explained anything away; we have tried proving again that the self is not *something* to be discovered, but a function of the organism and an unending process. We just realized that there was nothing to be negated in the first place and we had all been that way. We realize that it is not going to impact our ways of being much but our world-views probably. If our worldviews are corrected, the grave issue of self might dissolve and the metaphysical focus will shift to ethical concerns - of being good narratives.

The most frightening difficulty that any idea of individuality or self-notion could provide would be the fear of losing it – death. The self-fiction though has assisted us in surviving in the world it also places us at great pain and difficulty while it is time to leave the story incomplete - leaving up for some beautiful minds to conclude our story in the beautiful lines of an epitaph. Individual signing offs shouldn't tilt the balance of larger narratives nor should frighten the individual persons themselves, the little fictions that were enjoyed for a human lifetime; much lovelier it will be to be with the wondrous *reality* than being a personal permanence in it.

It takes us closer to the oneness with reality, is what Ramachandran has to conclude:

> So, in a sense, indirectly by saying that you are not a separate soul, that you are really part of this great dance of *Shiva*, far from being humiliating, it's actually ennobling. That would be

> my explanation of why people are always fascinated by questions about origins, and their place in the cosmos.[1]

The present work is not exhaustive and there are more assumptions in here than answers. It has been an interdisciplinary attempt at understanding the problem of self, its *origins* and *nature*, drawing inputs from developmental psychology and neuroscience and applying them to philosophical difficulties. The objective was to have a comprehensive understanding of the problem of self and the underlying mechanisms that help distinguish among "beings", "non-self-beings-but-selves", and "self-beings". As of today, many of the assumptions remain inconclusive at the speculative level and "…it is in the nature of the "mind-self-body-brain problem" that we must live for quite a while with theoretical approximations rather than complete explanations".[2] Though empirical sciences may not be in a position to offer readymade answers to all intriguing philosophical problems of self, laboratorial research might provide empirical insights into philosophical speculations.

Matter's ways of being are mysterious and who knows if it wasn't for its longing to know itself that man was fashioned? The joy in sparks of light being shed on trifling bundles of matter must be the reason why we humans are here the way we are.

[1] Ramachandran, "In the Mind of the Brain," Pp. 4-18.
[2] Damasio, *Self comes to Mind,* p. 16.

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