

CONCEPT OF SELF AND EXPERIENCED SELF.

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I HAVE recently been led to the study of the concept of self because of my search for a fundamental starting-point in philosophy which should unite in itself two classes of merits, (1) ability to hold important place in a logical system of thought, and (2) ability to call to the mind the concrete impressions which produced it.

The term "self" may be used in many senses. Those enumerated by Bradley and James cover all the uses I have been accustomed to notice until recently. And the forms of self under James's "spiritual" and "material me"¹ certainly contain all the ideational data and sense-impressions which we need to choose between and to mass together for the formation of our full concept of self. Bradley's analysis breaks up this group of data and distinguishes several meanings which can be given to the term "self." (1) It may refer to the section of consciousness observed during any unit of time we may choose to select.² (2) It may refer to certain aspects which most frequently occur throughout life, and which compose what he calls "the constant average man."³ (3) Some more isolated factor—as memory or purpose—may be selected from the life stream and called the "essential self."⁴ Or (6) the self may be contrasted with the not-self, and regarded as that residue which is left after "the limit of exchange of content between self and not-self" has been reached.⁵ Bradley finds no difficulty in dismissing one and all of these conceptions of the self, as vague and untrustworthy because unclear and undefined. In this he is, to a certain extent, justified because in things psychical it is probably impossible to draw a rigid line

¹ *Principles of Psychology*, Chapter X; *Psychology, Briefer Course*, Chapter XII.

² *Appearance and Reality*, pp. 77-78.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 80ff.

of demarcation between the like and the unlike. This difficulty, however, is found also in the physical world. It is impossible to measure anything with utter exactness; it is impossible to place a plane between two portions of water, one at 51° C and one at 50° C, which I propose to add together. Some of the 51° molecules have lost heat, some of the 50° have gained it, before the addition can be made. Kinetic activities of the molecules cause them to mix with a suddenness and irregularity which prohibits theoretical or practical locating of cleavage lines. This indefiniteness of outline is, of course, a feature of the concept of self, no matter what attempt to assemble all the images composing the concept might be made. Our question is, therefore, the following: Is it necessary to throw over the concept of self because of its indefiniteness? To this we may reply: All mental abstraction and generalization are based upon substitution of a word or a sign for a thing signified.⁶ "Smoke" is a general term which stands for a possible visual experience. Here we have what Taine calls a "couple," which may be written thus: Smoke (verbal percept or image) \rightarrow Visual experience, following, accompanying or preceding. One term in the couple is a word having a certain sound and a fixed usage in common experience. At the other end of the couple is the sense-experience.⁷

From this consideration, as it now seems to me, a refutation may be evolved of Bradley's argument against the self-concept on the ground of its unclearness. For suppose that when you utter the word "self" and try to utter it in any one of Bradley's seven senses you are unable to have a clear mental mosaic for any one of them. Suppose that you become still further disconcerted and thrown into bewildering unclearness, because for his first concept of self (1) you have a different mosaic tomorrow from what you had to-day. Even so, this imaginal unclearness is not decisive proof that you did not clearly *conceive* the self. For no single concept is used in any natural science which always has a setting in precisely the same imaginal complex. If I explain to you to-day the formula for a complex lens, $1/u + 1/v = 1/f$, I may very clearly image in my mind's eye the deduction as given in Duff's *Physics*, and the proof

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91. The numeral (6) indicates the place of this concept in Bradley's unsystematic enumeration of seven uncoordinated and overlapping concepts of the self. Only the more important of these are here cited.

⁶ *On Intelligence* (translation of T. D. Haye, 1872), Chapters I-III, *passim*.

⁷ It should be noted that the argument of this paper, though written on the basis of a purely verbal theory of the concept, could equally well be carried through in terms of any one of the doctrines which uphold the view that a concept is more-than-verbal.

will be rapid. In a month, if I have not thought about the proof at all in the interval, "Duff" may have vanished, yet I trust that by the knowledge of certain general principles and of the nature of wave motion I shall still be able to derive this concept and to relate it to other concepts. We may therefore conclude that, as the concept $1/u$, $F = mg$, $s = vt$ and the like differ from the corresponding concrete experiences, so self as a concept differs from self as experienced. As a concept it is stripped of certain characters—as experienced it cannot be deprived of any characters. In a word, we may apply Taine's formula to the self, as to the physical concept, and with the following result: Self, experiencer and experienced (including not merely "personal attitudes" but also images and sense-impressions) → Self as concept (without fixed or clear sense-content, yet perfectly definite as to its meaning).

The self is, accordingly, not merely one of the concepts which can and must be discussed in philosophy; it is the experienced self: And since also the self is experiencer as well as experienced it occupies the unique position (1) of experiencing unit and (2) of constructor of concepts. It is self which sees, hears, feels, thinks, takes part in the dramatic episodes of daily life. And it is self, also, which as thinker (isolating here one factor from the whole just mentioned) constructs concepts. It seems to follow that from either point of view, the psychological or the logical, the self constitutes the unavoidable starting point for philosophy.