

more elegantly pursued. And it grapples with largely *philosophical* questions through detailed chapters on novelists and scientists in the posthuman trajectory, but hardly a word is said about those philosophers who have devoted lifetimes to the issues raised therein. It is as if Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty never existed. In short, too much is devoted to researching *How We Became Posthuman*, too little devoted to thinking its very possibility.

JAMES BROUWER, *University of Guelph*

Self-knowledge and the Self

DAVID A. JOPLING

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Should Oedipus have heeded the imperative writ large above the Delphic temple gates—"Know thyself?"—by engaging in critical self-inquiry? Would a tenacious drive towards self-evaluation have enabled Oedipus to avoid his tragic destiny? In David Jopling's book, *Self-knowledge and the Self*, the focus of the inquiry is on answering questions of this sort, questions concerning the nature and limits of self-knowledge and their implications for moral agency. While Jopling uses dramatic and literary works (including Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*) to illustrate key philosophical points, his aim goes far beyond clarifying the themes of drama and literature. The author summarises the book's project in the following way: "The goal of this work is to examine some of the epistemological, phenomenological, and moral dimensions of self-knowledge."

In pursuing this goal, Jopling highlights three theories of philosophical psychology, each explaining why an individual agent would reflectively ask (or fail to ask) and felicitously answer (or fail to answer) the questions "Who am I?" and "How should I be?" According to the author, these theories partake in one or more of three broad traditions in Western philosophy, each positing a different conception of what constitutes self-knowledge, as follows: (1) an attainable virtue; (2) an elusive goal; and (3) a process of self-criticism. Subsumed within the first tradition is Stuart Hampshire's philosophy of "stepping back," or gaining a more objective vantage from which to evaluate the self; as a result, the individual achieves a humanly good end in life: namely, self-improvement. Partaking in the second and third traditions, Jean Paul Sartre's theory postulates a perpetually uncertain and incomplete project of existing as the basis for the individual's pursuit of self-knowledge; that is, a project that involves self-deception, self-critique and overcoming conventional modes of self-understanding in order to approximate, though never fully attain, an authentic self. The third theory, held by Richard Rorty, emphasises the contingent and contextually sensitive quality of the self, which must

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be read and interpreted imaginatively, and sometimes ironically, to suit the relevant discourse. Acquiring self-knowledge, and thereby rendering a new self-interpretation, disappoints the goal of reaching a definitive and improved understanding of the self (in agreement with Jopling's second tradition) since no interpretation in any discourse is complete or privileged (*pro* the hermeneutic circle and *contra* Hampshire's view). Yet, despite their differing loyalties, Jopling asserts that all three theories make the shared claim that "acquisition of self-knowledge is to a significant extent an action of the self, for the self, and by the self."

The three theories of philosophical psychology—represented by the thought of Hampshire, Sartre and Rorty—serve as foils for the fourth, and Jopling's favourite, theory: the theory of dialogic self-knowing. In the second chapter, Jopling dons his gloves and work boots, so-to-speak, to do, what he calls, "largely ground-clearing work": the task of distinguishing alternative approaches to understanding the self—such as inquiries about ideally objective selves, psychological profiles, self-concepts, personal narratives and subjectively felt selves—from self-knowledge proper. He then devotes separate chapters to presenting the tenets of the three foil theories—chapter 3 (Hampshire), chapter 4 (Sartre) and chapter 5 (Rorty). The author's central concern, though, is to refute the claim shared by the three philosophical psychologies, i.e., that the locus for gaining self-knowledge should be situated solely with the individual. Jopling summarises his main objection to this claim in the following manner: "The individualism that informs these three philosophical psychologies is problematic because it is purchased at the cost of an implausible account of the social and interpersonal dimension of self-knowledge." A better account, Jopling argues, would put an end to such overweening individualism by introducing the possibility of acquiring self-knowledge through interaction between the self and others. Therefore, the success of the book's project depends on the success of the argument in favour of the theory of dialogic self-knowing.

Jopling devotes the last chapter (chapter 6) to arguing for the thesis that the theory of dialogic self-knowing provides the missing link towards a more robust account of self-inquiry. The author considers three versions of the thesis in favour of self-knowledge acquired through the relation between the self and others, each involving a distinct translation of this relation, as follows: (1) involvement in communities with like-minded persons, (2) truth-preserving intersubjective agreement and consensus, and (3) dialogic encounters with interlocutors. In response to the first translation, in which self-knowledge demands agreement with fellow like-minded community members, Jopling objects that the requirement of like-mindedness perpetuates group delusions, and therefore undermines the possibility of veridical insights into the self. In addressing the second translation, the author rejects elements of both Charles Taylor's and Ernst Tugendhat's formulations; the former on the ground that the drive to radically re-evaluate the self with reference to others's standards fails to guarantee the accuracy of those

standards; the latter because it inadequately specifies what constitutes consensus and expert knowledge in the concept of "answering to someone else." Jopling characterises the third translation in a more favourable light: "If the acquisition of self-knowledge is part of a dialogical project, then to be self-knowledgeable is to be an interlocutively and interpersonally responsive agent."

In Jopling's assessment of these three versions of his thesis, he prizes one feature above all: that they explain the self's ability to learn about itself by recognising the *sui generis* qualities of the other person as distinct from itself. While the presence of this feature is weakest in the first translation, it is, by comparison, only slightly stronger in the second and strongest in the third. Here, the author draws heavily on the concepts of Otherness and dialogue in the writings of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. Dialogue resembles a vague, spontaneous and mutually engaging exchange, an exchange that distinguishes the self from the other person as Other—or as a distinct being *qua* human (not simply another self). For Jopling, a theory that explains how self-knowledge is acquired through dialogue is superior to a theory that does not. Why? Because it accounts for an alternative source of self-knowledge: insight gained by the self, not only in communion with itself, but also in dialogue that reveals the differences between the self and the other person as Other. Hence, Jopling establishes his criterion of success: that a theory of self-inquiry accounts for the competency of the self to engage in reflective dialogue. Since the third translation does indeed pinpoint dialogue as crucial to self-inquiry, the theory of dialogic self-knowing, the author argues, prevails over its competitors.

At any rate, some doubts still arise as to the cogency of Jopling's argument in favour of the theory of dialogic self-knowing. In the book's finale, the author employs another literary work—*The Stone Angel* by Margaret Lawrence—to illustrate how interaction between a self-inquirer and the other person as Other can yield critical insight into the moral character of the self. Although a fated air surrounds the meeting between the protagonist, Hagar Shipley, and the stranger in Lawrence's novel, such an encounter in ordinary life seems far too happenstance to ground the individual's need for consistent and reliable self-development. While Jopling's project accomplishes the goal it sets out to—viz., to "examine some of the epistemological, phenomenological, and moral dimensions of self-knowledge"—the reader is left with a nagging suspicion that the success of his argument in favour of the theory of dialogic self-knowing was staged. The author's favourite theory is almost too perfectly tailored to the criterion of success: that it captures the competency of the self to engage in dialogue with the other person as Other. Nevertheless, Jopling's project is a worthy one, and his argument—though not decisively successful—marks a significant contribution towards resolving the problem of self-knowledge.

SHANE JESSE RALSTON, *University of Ottawa*

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