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## The self and its values as content *per se* in terms of microgenesis and process philosophy

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**Abstract.** The idea of the self is still a philosophical problem for psychology, neurology, and even international law borrows ideas of the self to interpret the phenomenon of national identity and develop further regulations. The ambiguity surrounding the concept of the self creates challenges for academic and formal definitions, necessitating thorough analysis in this paper. Thus, the aim was to provide the reader with a series of non-substantial and non-dualistic versions of the self. In this paper the authors tried to approach the subject (the self) from microgenetic point of view based on works of Jason W. Brown. This analysis was justified by the non-linear, non-substantial and non-dualistic paradigms growing popular in globalised world and in academic communities. In particular, it was established that European Society for Process Thought, Claremont Process Nexus, International Process Network and other societies offer series of conferences on regular basis for many years to satisfy the need in more accurate definitions of the non-substantial versions of the self. It is demonstrated that duality of the self and the world can be eliminated by consideration of the self from the process point of view, that is, as a dynamical subject-superject, not a classic subject-object relation. The results of the paper can be used by PhD students, scholars and researchers in their further advances in neurology, psychology, law, identity studies, sociology that aim to provide both theoretical and practical solutions in their areas

**Keywords:** microgenesis; creative evolution; Alfred North Whitehead; process psychology; neurology; coincidentia oppositorum

### Introduction

Law, sociology, cognition therapies, philosophy – all these sciences attempt to find and define the elements that constitute the principles. One of the principles is to start from the utmost possible entity that can be perceived or logically understood. For identity theories (in law studies, sociology, cognition, epistemology) this entity is the self. Science still does not know how to approach this entity. Some methods are used, such as comparative or analogy, where the self is supposed to

be the product of the brain and the brain is, supposedly, can be compared to computer machine or modular systems. Another method is introspection, where the self is supposed to be identical to bare what it is. In psychology the self can be understood as an interplay between the outer world and mind. In some cognition studies the self is either the sum of subconscious and conscious, or it can be the source of what therapists call *id*, *libido*, *sublime* etc. And since these results of researches

### Suggested Citation:

Levin, O., & Zhadiaiev, D. (2024). The self and its values as content *per se* in terms of microgenesis and process philosophy. *Philosophy, Economics and Law Review*, 4(2), 8-15. doi: 10.31733/2786-491X-2024-2-8.

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are different, this article aimed at further explanation of the self from microgenetic point of view. This version of the self is growing popular in Western academic environment but quite new for the rest of the world.

In the period from 2018 to 2024, some articles were published on this topic. In particular, when the self is studied, it is argued that the dualism of the mind and brain can be overcome by introducing the categories of time and serial order, how the self can be interpreted in terms of events of perception. P. Stenner (2024) argues that the category of time, as such, must be interpreted in terms of the self. Which means, in its turn, that the self is a condition that needed to perceive past, present, and the future as modes (categories) of time. This problem requires revision if the concept of time back to St. Augustinus (*Confession*, book eleven). Human beings can experience and interpret events such as the *now* of the past or the *now* of the future through their perception, cognition, and emotional connection in time. But most interesting observation was done in 2020 when perception of the self was associated with different states of perceiver (dream state, wakefulness, disease, mental malfunction etc.). It is shown that the ideas of the entity that used to be called the self can be interpreted partly as an illusion, partly as experience of *its own* experience. This was reflected in J.W. Brown (2020). It requires a more detailed explanation of how we define the nature, experience, and concept of illusion.

In J.W. Brown (2021) was demonstrated how novel states of mind can be arisen from the so-called short-term memory, and long-term memory. These are different realms in the self that provide consciousness of the self with different data on the level of phenomena, as the specific events of consciousness. The connection between mind and brain is explained by non-dualistic approach to the process of cognition and needs further studies in what we call “inner” and “outer” experience, “feeling” and “category”. The self was demonstrated as many-dimensional entity not only in terms of its temporal dynamic evolution (microgenesis) but also in light of inner states or *qualia*, namely, in terms of drives and values, or instincts and ideals. This work was done mostly by J.W. Brown & D. Zhadaiiev (2022) and it shows that some mechanisms between pre-established functions, needs (survival, nutrition, etc.) and categories (thoughts as ideas, ideals, principles) can be traced. The problem for science remains to determine whether formal, mechanistic terminology can adequately describe microgenetic processes.

More applicable studies were recently conducted by X. Gao *et al.* (2022) in definition of the self in terms of brain, face recognition, numbers. This method provided solid data based on clinical researches but, as any practical and empirical approach, it may blur the difference between different concepts as it operates by continuous data and formulates in discrete definitions, concepts. The concrete empirical data of the brain events that

can help understand the idea of the self can be complimented by rather philosophical, fundamental works and one of them is by R. Lestienne (2022) about Whitehead where ground-breaking cosmology of the Alfred North Whitehead considered as a philosophy of time. This work is important for the research as it takes into account the category of time that aids the understanding and interpretation of the self as dynamical, not substance-based entity and as a process where outer data merge into the one event called microgenetic cognition. Based on the above-mentioned studies, this article aims to explore the concept of “self”, to consider its potential content and to assess the relevance of the subject-object duality in its understanding. The research aimed to explore possible answers to several key tasks:

1. Assessing the relevance of a dualistic approach in understanding the values of the self.
2. Interpreting the idea of the self in terms of its dynamic relationships, including part-whole and past-now-future dimensions.
3. Investigating the content of the self that defines it as an event, thing, or process.

Methods used in the paper were the next: analysis (deconstruction of the key-terms), comparison (the idea of the self is compared to new, recent, and traditional interpretations), synthesis (the idea of the self is constructed on the basis microgenetic approach and popular theories), descriptive (the idea of the self is described as it is not the thing that can be actively experimented by). The novelty of this work provides complex-based solution as it enriches current researches with contextual data in terms of traditional philosophical views and new neurological data.

### Historical and philosophical context of microgenetic theory

The *continuity* of the Brown's ideas with the historico-philosophical context can most evidently be found in that binary character of the theoretical understanding (logical quantifiers: *all*, *some*, *affirmo/nego*) and in an attempt to overcome that. Nicolas de Cusa tried to do that before neurology developed its approaches to study binary mind/brain relations. Demonstrating his principle *coincidentia oppositorum* (unity of the opposite) he used an analogy with the circle and straight line: if radius increases *ad infinitum*, then one geometrical figure (circle) turns to be the other (straight line). Despite this demonstration was used for theology (and social and political transformations), its pure metaphysical nature was borrowed centuries later, H. Bergson (1911) made kind of theoretical inversion of this same principle when considers the principles of scientific methodology – a ratio between an intellect and intuition. In particular, he makes analogy between intellect and straight line and between an intuition and the circle: an intellect (formal logic) has advantages because it gives precision, a definitive knowledge

(Brown & Stenner, 2024). However, this definition achieved at cost of limiting the scopes of research, that is, by ignoring the context, historical development (temporality), uniqueness of the event (all what postulates dialectical logic of Hegel in opposition to formal approaches). It can be possible to make right decision in particular situation that will turn out to be wrong in a long run (Stenner, 2023). That is why H. Bergson compared intellect to a straight line taken as an infinitely small fragment of the circle (here inversion happens when H. Bergson appealed to an *infinitely small* piece of circle and Nicolas of Cusa suggested *infinitely large* circle). Despite these approaches are contrary to each other (are contrary in their forms, not in their content or meaning), they give qualitatively same results (different elements of experience are turning into each other).

A novelty of microgenetic approach is that it does not borrow known principles (however, “known” “principles” in metaphysics do not mean they are outdated, for principles *per se* are as novel and actual as far as they eternal. Otherwise it is not about the *principles*, but having just rules, opinions, or different thoughts in mind) but develops quite different approach (and thus, this trend is a sign of philosophical, not just technical, mode of thought). For sure, some readers may find out that J.W. Brown uses the idea that was developed by Heraclitus (all things flow, *panta rhei*) but this is another evidence that the principles of microgenetic theory as actual as they are eternal – they still in the context of historical evolution of thought of human kind yet with new observations and thus, newly interpreted for the sake of avoidance of those inconsistencies caused by too rigorous use of clarity and exactness promised by laws of formal logic (Whitehead, 1933). The question J.W. Brown addresses in these *Essays* – a proper ration of endogeneous and exogenous processes – is, actually, the core riddle of the last 2500 years and it is not only about psychology (Whitehead, 1978). Once we know the proper answer, many sciences and art will advance prominently since endo- and exogenous phenomena (processes) are just another perspective of part-whole, of what is actual and of what is non-temporal, of conceptual and of emotional, of immanent and of transcendent, of substantial and of accidental, of particle and of wave etc (Brown, 2018).

However, it seems possible to make some progress towards the answer and, possibly, make an operation that incited some epic turns in philosophy. One of them was well-known Kant’s so-called Copernicus’ turn: despite Kant said that it was Hume who awakened him from the dogmatic slumber, Kant himself abandoned the most popular question at his times (since 1500 to 1800) on how many substances are out there (one – monism, Spinoza), (two- dualism, Descartes), (many – pluralism, Leibniz and, to some extent, Whitehead, though he is totally against any substance-theory) (Zhadaiev, 2023). All these approaches to solve

question on how many substances are there have really powerful arguments and it is very likely that 500 years later one of them will be popular again with the new interpretation (Dewey, 1939). B. Spinoza’s monism is getting more and more popular in light of eco-movements: “a separation or alienation of man from the nature as different organisms is not convincing since human being borrows part of the Earth’s atmosphere each second – they are breathing and in this process the line that separates two seemingly different organisms – of the planet and of the human being – is blurred in lungs, in brain... in mind...”. And there is another point closely related not only to B. Spinoza’s monism but also to J.W. Brown’s microgenesis – psychology cannot explain mind/brain problem (see *The Mind/Brain* chapter) on the basis of duality and microgenesis helps as an approach that can figuratively be called “more dynamic version of monism,” or, say, “cellular monism.”

In the way Kant implemented his epic turn stepping away from the so-called main problem – the question about substance – Kant asks rather: how it is possible to be able to know being, objects, phenomena? It is not implied that Kant should be followed in his theory, of course (and if he would, Kant himself would be very embarrassed since in this way a “follower” uses one of the established framework of mind, which cannot be any real philosophy but imitation of it). So, to make any ambitious attempt to give the answer to the problem of duality is to step away from the duality and to rethink duality (endogenous-exogenous). Possibly, the hint can be given by Origen from Alexandria. It may sound irrelevant to psychology and Origen was not accepted by official church, but the authors think his interpretation was brilliant. And the way Medieval theology borrowed ancient Greek philosophy (Thomas Aquinas did not create his famous five demonstrations of God’s existence but used rhetoric to develop the only argument of Aristotle on God as first mover – Aquinas applied it to few more different terms (beauty, perfection etc.), leaving in the same principle). In the chapter on “Feeling and Action” of the recent work mentioned J.W. Brown (2024) reader can find more details but it is necessary to consider how the duality of freedom and necessity was overcome in centuries before and, perhaps, a hidden *pattern* for finding the methodology to approach the solution of this problem could be found. Pattern *per se* in J.W. Brown’s works is not associated with kind of cliché but: “a real... in nature that goes unnoticed because it is uniform” (Brown, 2002). Origen, making his quest in to what degree God is almighty comes to conclusion, that there is not just two opposite categories. The opposite categories were represented in Old and New Testament controversy: God’s power to *influence* the mind and humans responsibility of their *free* choice. If God has that power to influence (and thus, to commit sins), then human being should not be fully responsible for sins committed. If sins are committed by free will,

then God should punish for sins and for that choice not properly made. To avoid this antinomy Origen offers three coordinated categories (e.g., freedom, necessity, and possibility) instead of two. The new factor here is the one he pictures as the rain (*possibility*) that can pour onto field with seeds (good deeds done freely) or not. So, in terms of pure metaphysics, Origen avoided duality by implementing the category that unites opposite categories. In his beautiful explanation the soil (the field) is what given to us as granted (*necessity*), and the wish to sow the seeds (free will to make a choice for the good – category of *freedom*) or being lazy for that (a choice for the bad) is human's responsibility that God can punish or reward – these images are exemplification of the freedom we possess and responsibility for it. So, it is not the opposition where one category may or may not dominate the other but the *possibility* (kind of randomness) that makes the final decision and solves that controversy: rain may pour or not for the harvest (God's blessing to reach Heavens) to grow and being reap or not (Origen, 2019).

### Microgenetic theory and its philosophical innovations

Some similar theoretical tactics must be implemented to avoid dual approach that cannot answer some questions of endo- and exogenous processes and in microgenesis it is an image of the fountain where top and the bottom parts are in constant flux, core of the self (or subconscious) reaching consciousness, self reaches external worlds and comes back, awareness reaches the content and comes back for another cycle (Zhadiaiev, 2020). In Whitehead, for example, it is the principle (1) many becomes (2) one and (3) increased by one (tree-part onto-epistemological scheme).

It was outlined here in this part that microgenetic ideas offered in J.W. Brown's (2017) book are organic outcomes out of convergent ideas (ones that aim at overcoming duality – Abelard's intention to add rational elements to irrational beliefs, B. Spinoza's pantheism, Nicolas of Cusa's *coincidentia oppositorum*, H. Bergson's evolution, intellect and intuition, A.N. Whitehead's principle *many become one and increased by one*, etc). Sometimes the mind explains the self, sometimes the self explains the mind. A human being cannot lie to their mind – it is mind that can lie to human being. The similar conclusion can be found in Immanuel Kant's works – people often use to play with their imagination not always understanding when it is imagination that plays with them. This line is another proof that man's mind works by the same principles (regardless the progress of technology, thus, cannot be reduced to technology, block- or modular theories) and indirectly it is another evidence of how contemporary and related to the past inquiries the question about the subject of psychology relevant and is organically up to the date (Seghal, 2016).

It is far easier to write some books than to read them, as Medieval philosopher once said (Abélard, 2022). There are, however, some books that easier to edit than others. This saying may echoing thousand years after P. Abélard thought on books. Some of them are written by J.W. Brown. The reader will find a dance of logic and clinical experience, the poetry of corollary in J.W. Brown's explanation – a style that organically developed out of his non-dualistic microgenetic theory, where multiplicity achieved out of unity and it is all one continuous stream, reflected in its discrete droplets (Brown, 2017). The thought to mention here one thousand years-old saying (seemingly, absolutely not relevant to the study of mind) was not occasional and suggested by three reasons (Stenner, 2015). First, the problem that J.W. Brown concerns mostly is the nature of interaction between different elements of experience (Stenner, 2011). This interaction happens not only in physical perception (between traditional, yet oversimplified concepts such as "subject" and "object" (S-O) but between writer and reader, between writer and its text, between text and the reader, in what author wrote and, how they were interpreted, in what author means and how they are understood. These all are not identical perspectives and suggest that the problem of cognition is far more complex (thus, is more interesting) than in banal duality of logical S-O relations: "It is less likely that the laws of mind are the basis of physical laws than the other way around, but the possibility is worth considering" (Brown, 2017). Second, the Medieval author was more interested in *reason* and *understanding* than in belief in somewhat similar way like J.W. Brown is concerned in *mind* as the flux out of which science collects more data about the brain and not in confession of popular theories of the brain as mechanical container of the mind (Stenner, 2024). It needs to be understood first what we are feeling and then believe it. Not vice versa. Where belief comes first and not understanding, human being is rather having hallucinations. Where P. Abélard states: *Nihil credendum nisi prius intellectum* (we should not believe if we do not understand first) to beat some social illusions of his time, J.W. Brown puts it like: *to think the world is illusion is one thing, to feel it another* (Brown, 2017). And the next (third) reason is more important here. In the century of technologies, when each "like" and "comment" is a potential source for currency and the income can be derivative (generated) out of interactions online, the thought on thinking and cognition (reflection) still matters as thousand or more years ago. Despite the world is changing dramatically, the modes of perception are still the same as at the times of Zhuangzi dreaming he is a butterfly, as in times when crowd of alumni gathered together to have opportunity to listen to P. Abélard, and to the date, when observed photons behave both as particle and a wave at the same time, and as at the times of virtual and augmented reality (Zhadiaiev, 2020). This comparison



suggests that the world and the self, mind and all what it understands (or hopes to) are only seemingly in opposition but actually not in fully true state of things are opposed as subject and object of perception: to perceive an object and to describe that perception of that object are different, at least, not identical perceptions (though object can be agreed to be considered the same): “no actual entity can be conscious of its own satisfaction; for such knowledge would be a component in the process, and would thereby alter the satisfaction” (Whitehead, 1978).

This topic was mostly covered by J.W. Brown in his book series and about 200 articles published over the past 40 years. It represents a coherent point of view in which theory of evolution expands beyond just biological domain and reaches the level of perception where the paradigm of the subject-object relationships is absent or performs only derivative role (Brown, 2023). Since the article concerns the phenomenon of the self in relation to perception, M. Seghal (2016) is another author that explains a process and web-like character of how consciousness works. The main material was borrowed from A.N. Whitehead (1933; 1978) and H. Bergson (1911). These last sources represent a solid cosmological ground for metaphysical scheme we aim to draw with its application to microgenetic ideas (Gao *et al.*, 2022). One of the recent editions of Origen (2019) serves this research as another example of the fact that it is not that ideas are dependent on time passage but it is time and contemporaneity is shaped by some new versions of interpretations of known philosophical ideas.

### New perspectives: Microgenesis as a horizon

When it comes to psychology, we logically and naturally assume the *mind*. When it comes to neurology, we associate term *brain* with it. Each science should provide a definition of its subject. With mind, in comparison to the brain, it is more getting complicated (Lestienne, 2022). But the science without justification of what it gives to others is not a science. Here philosophy is at work: it gives such and such forms of arguments and definitions for psychology (actually, philosophy is at work when it comes to any other sciences for sciences themselves have no apparatus to explain the need for the good what it aims to produce (Weber, 1946). However, it is much easier to provide a definition of an object or phenomena that experienced by human being, which is felt (Lyotard, 1979). In psychology the problem with its subject (the definition of the subject studied) is thrice more complex:

- ▲ Since Aristotle’s judgment about the soul (how difficult it is to define it) it is still not that easy to define something what is not experienced directly.

- ▲ The definition of the subject (mind) must be provided by the same subject (mind), what is different from traditional way of academic research where

subject perceives an object. That is, if we follow the requirement to define what we study in psychology, psychology then stands in a different set of sciences, not natural sciences and, may be, not even humanities or social sciences since the very paradigm of understanding is different.

- ▲ The mind and the self of it supposed to be a substance (something, that lied below the surface of things or phenomena), a “thing” that provides an “inception” of perception, something that feels the action upon itself and we seemingly do not have such a thing for study either: (a) none outside of the mind has such a direct access to it as to any other ordinary objects and (b) if human being has that only access, then what it *is* that access’ to it? If it is *something* different, we do not have full access to the mind, and if it is the same as the self, then perception is like multiplying by zero and having “zero” in sum (the “bits” of perception amount to zero) or multiplying by one and having in sum the same entity, not more and not less (self cannot know more than it is already knows about itself).

- ▲ In his other work (*The self-embodying mind: Process, brain dynamics and the conscious present*) J.W. Brown (2002) notifies reader that: “Mental events are unobservable in one’s self; the event evades detection; the act of observing alters the observed event”. That is, the perspective these *Selected Essays* opens is a non-substantial approach (and as such, it is a process (Lyotard, 1979). It would be worth to skip lengthy theoretical analysis (reader will make it and test it on their own) and rather demonstrate ideas seemed to be most interesting. In many other works J.W. Brown hesitates if the self is an illusion or not. On the one hand, yes, it is an illusion:

- ▲ for it is not possible to demonstrate that self which is *evident*;

- ▲ for attributes ascribed to the self are different at different times and the self, as a substratum of those attributes (accidents, in terms of substance-qualities approaches): is human being the one who possess such and such knowledge or not? And if human being gradually masters such and such skills which they had not before, then what defines its self?.

On the other hand, the self supposed to be more real than it appears to be in theory since it is the “ground” where outer world objects, “lands on,” the platform for any other possibility for epistemology and ontology. At least, to add something to the explanation of perception, the perceiver needs that “something” to which new event of perception adds “something else” (James, 1890). This last construction (or scheme) seems logical or, at least, reasonable, understandable, not contradictory (Zhadiaiev, 2023).

To avoid abstract reasoning and ask about illusionary nature of the idea of the self, is to consider the self as starting point for drives and values it is surprising how the subjects at all levels of animal life (human including)

strive to defend themselves or avoid harm or, feels fear to lose itself in death (Brown, 2022). All these emotions have no verbal and logical explanations (Pachalska, 2012). Quite opposite: logic and language follow this fear or drive and particular individual life and civilisations are building up into sophisticated ramification of languages and cultures being rooted to that self.

In cases when conflicts reach their extreme points and opponents fearlessly prove their beliefs – beliefs and values are often explained as ideals not of external world but as *ideas* (impossible to “exist” or explained without the self) (McLean, 1990). Quite often, these values and ideals are not justified as goals towards which we should aim on imperative basis (forced education, discipline, etc.) but justified *ad contrario* – a supposition to reject that values (justice, arts, idea of God etc.) which, in its turn, logically leads to contradictory and not satisfying conclusions: if, say, someone is allowed to steal, then they will not likely to agree to be robbed (James, 1912). These abstract, vague ontological questions necessarily make the authors to think that without the self all of values are meaningless (Pachalska & MacQueen, 2005). Moreover, even when conflicts of the events in history trapped into dead end, the *Golden Rule* in almost all religions and cultures steps into its positive or negative definition where the final appeal is to the self (“do as *you yourself* want to be treated by others” or, in negative definition (*apophatic*): “do not act the way *you* do not want others acted upon *you*”). This self (imagined as that “substrate,” “substance,” “ground,” “platform” etc.) is not a “thing” in a set of external objects. It is from different “set” and, possibly, something out of any “sets” since it gives kind of unity – it “glues” the world of external objects with itself. Its function could be compared to mixbus compressors in music production that turn different sounds into entire piece making it sound relatively uniform (in terms of dynamics).

Yet, even this comparison-approximation is wrong, for music is not made by compressors or for compressors and the self transforms the world perceived and stands as its final goal. One of the explanations offered by the authors J.W. Brown & P. Stenner (2024) in their new book is: “But there are deeper problems with self-knowledge: contents other than those in introspection are unavailable to awareness, there is a lack of access to subsurface cognition, and there is a question as to the agential status of awareness; that

is, awareness does not search out a content but is produced by the content it is looking for. Microgenesis obligates that awareness is created by surfacing contents with an inability to know submerged (transformed) phases from which the surface is elaborated. These deeper stages have been studied with experimental and clinical methods”.

## Conclusions

This article makes it evident that the self is not such a thing that can be understood as a regular object. Based on J.W. Brown’s works, P. Stenner and other authors came to conclusion, that any subject-object approaches are outdated as they postulate substance-accident mode of analysis and which introduces some dualism (ambiguity) in understanding of the self as phenomenon. As it becomes clearer that the phenomenon of the self based on process-like events, not things or substances, it is not accurate to call it “phenomenon” *per se* since it exists in the dynamics of the events traditionally called “past”, “now” and “future”. Also, this actual entity (the self) should be considered in its dynamics of the states and parts: wakefulness-sleep, core-drive-consciousness-values.

The peculiar character of such entity is that it is both the perceiver of its content and the content itself for its perception. This makes quite unusual this entity to be analyzed by traditional methodology or in terms of subject-object dualism. So, the values of the self have elusive character as they need to be specified by the content different from the self. For now, it is argued that the values of the self are the self as its own content. Prospective researches can be focused on the nature, principles or mechanisms of how it is possible to apply accidental *qualia* to such an entity like the self and whether it can be described in terms of logical predicates, pronouns, values, functions. Important role will play those researches which differentiate the self from the so-called ego (psychology, religion, spirituality etc.) and if they specify in what way the self can have elements of conscience (ethics).

## Acknowledgements

None.

## Conflict of interest

None.

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