THE BODY: WHAT VIPASSANA MEDITATION REVEALS ABOUT HOW WE ARE CONNECTED TO THE WORLD

Joo Heung Lee[*]

I recently completed a brief refresher course in Vipassana meditation after some personal setbacks disrupted my fledgling practice and accompanying equanimity. It was much needed. My mojo is back, and I know more definitively than ever that the key to my personal happiness is daily meditation. The reason why this is so important is that (as I said previously) Vipassana meditation is to the mind what physical exercise is to the body: it is necessary for good health. It is actually more vital than physical exercise insofar as the body can be exercised while the mind is on autopilot, whereas meditation requires the vigilant awareness of the intertwining of mind and body. In other words, it is possible to have a healthy body while possessing a diseased mind (e.g. "meatheads") whereas a healthy mind will invariably lead to a healthier body. This is not to say that a Vipassana meditator cannot suffer from cancer. But a meditator who has cancer will be in much better shape than a non-meditator who is similarly afflicted. The bottom line is that the mind and body are inextricably tied together, and a well-ordered soul is axiomatically (as philosophers East and West have recognized since ancient times) one in which the mind rules over the body.

Before I develop the centrality of the body in mediating the mind's relation to the external world, I would like to tackle a topic that has baffled philosophers (both professional and amateur) since the dawn of history: the meaning of life. Simply put, the meaning of life is to become the best person you can be. The key is how one defines "best." Hedonists and Epicureans insist that the best life is the most pleasurable one. In my opinion (actually, not just in my opinion), this is patently wrong. We come closer to the truth with Aristotle's virtue ethics, which maintains that the good life is the happy life. Happiness is irreducible to pleasure. There is a rational component to happiness that excludes considering only animal pleasures. Actually, Aristotle himself insists that animal pleasures (eating, sex) do contribute to the happy life. This is where Buddhist ethics would somewhat diverge from Plato's greatest student. For a Buddhist, the happy life is the purely rational life. In this respect, Buddhists come closer to Plato than Aristotle does. However, whereas Plato insists that it is possible to divorce the soul from the body, Buddhists would say (in concert with Aristotle) that this is impossible—at least in this life.

This is one of the major reasons why a Buddhist ethics also diverges from Jewish, Christian, and Islamic ethics. With some iconoclastic exceptions, the Abrahamic faiths tend to suggest that the body corrupts the purity of the soul. Judaism arguable esteems the body more than its daughter religions. Even so, like its daughters, Judaism establishes a fairly strict separation between the sacred realm of Yahweh and the profane world of human beings. In conjunction with this dualism, the Abrahamic faiths typically define the good life as one in accordance with the laws of God. So human goodness is defined by divine standards imposed externally. Buddhism, on the other hand, understands human goodness to be a function of

---

[*] Dr. JOO HEUNG LEE, Associate Professor, Oakton Community College, Email: JooHeungLee@yahoo.com.

behavior conducive to happiness and the minimization of suffering on our own terms. This is not to say that we exclusively define the nature of happiness. Rather, it is nature which dictates what we need to do to be happy. The *Dhamma* (or *Dharma*) is nothing else but this law of nature.

The law of nature dictates that to live in this world is to be embodied. This is why we cannot pretend that we are purely rational agents immune to the exigencies of the body. In other words, this is why Kant is wrong. Kant argues that the commands of reason must be obeyed irrespective of the demands of sensibility. Thus, the moral law for Kant manifests itself in the form of an imperative. What the Buddha realized is that there is no such thing as a categorical imperative. All imperatives are hypothetical. The moral law only applies insofar as one wants to be happy. For Kant, happiness is a negligible consideration. Not so for the Buddha. Happiness IS the *telos* of human life (in concordance with Aristotle), and the *Dhamma* dictates that this can only be achieved through mastery of our animal impulses—not through a command of reason or even habitual practice, but through eradicating the roots of our egoism through the dispassionate observation of sensation.

What the Buddha saw very clearly (in fact, this is the very meaning of the word "Vipassana") is that the ego is the source of all of our misery. It blinds us to the fact of our interconnectedness with the world. This is why Nietzsche's "ethics" also falls short. Nietzsche insightfully recognized that Kant's categorical imperative "smells of cruelty." He rejected any morality that imposed its demands externally (despite Kant's insistence that the moral law was a function of autonomy). However, Nietzsche's solution to the problem of morality was to celebrate the ego over against any (imaginary) transcendent commandments. Consequently, Nietzsche's philosophy comes across as pessimistic—despite his insistence that he was the great affirmer of life. He dooms himself to a miserable life of solitude on the mountaintop, alone in his certainty that only the individual matters. It is not an accident that Nietzsche is considered a forerunner of Existentialism. Similarly, despite his attempts to distance himself from his "teacher" Schopenhauer, he ultimately shares with the ultimate pessimist a very negative view of humanity as a whole. It is an interesting coincidence that the fundamental Buddhist concept of *Anicca* (impermanence) is pronounced as a rejection of Nietzsche (A-Nietzsche).

Schopenhauer was one of the first Western philosophers who incorporated the insights of Buddhism into his thought. Specifically, Schopenhauer's description of the Will's indiscriminate urge TO BE mirrors the Buddhist concept of *tanha,* or thirst (typically translated as "desire"). According to Buddhism's Second Noble Truth, *tanha* is the root of all suffering. It is responsible for the development of separate individuals, all of whom greedily chase after their sustenance no matter the cost to everything else around them. However, Buddhism prescribes a remedy to the misery that inevitably results: the Noble 8-fold path. This is the path of liberation from the ego and its accompanying suffering. Schopenhauer similarly diagnoses moral evil to be a function of the ultimately illusory concept of the ego. For Schopenhauer, moral goodness is reducible to egolessness. Whereas he argues that this is a capability that individuals possess more or less innately, Buddhists insist that this is something any human being can cultivate through the practice of meditation. Therefore, whereas Schopenhauer throws up his hands in despair over the patently obvious fact that most of us are fundamentally selfish, Buddhists smile with the understanding that the appropriate attitude towards the ignorant is not contempt but compassion.

Arguably, the most compelling analysis of morality throughout history has been in terms of the Golden Rule: *Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you*. The reason the Golden Rule works so well is that most of us share similar desires. Based on this, the Utilitarian argument that the *summum bonum* is to maximize the collective happiness of the greatest number seems to make sense. Yet, the problem with the Golden Rule is that many of the things that give us happiness (i.e. pleasure) are quite mundane. How would one compare the pleasure that dozens of human beings may get from eating a good steak versus the pain the cow experienced while being butchered? Peter Singer, applying Utilitarian principles to Animal Ethics, argues that there is no comparison: human pleasure from eating animals is negligible compared to the pain of the animal being eaten. Proponents of human exceptionalism argue otherwise. From a Buddhist perspective, both sides miss the point. Pleasure should NEVER be a consideration when determining the morality of an action. The only factor that counts is suffering. Of course, occasionally there has to be a trade-off, and that is when Utilitarian considerations might apply. Nevertheless, by and large, the majority of situations that fall under the purview of Utilitarianism would not qualify (at least not for the same reasons) as applicable to Buddhist ethics.

The Western philosopher who I believe comes closest to a Buddhist ethics is Henri Bergson. In his classic work *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson articulates a more primordial ground for our noblest impulses than the imperative formulation of Kant and moralities based on traditional religion. In contrast to traditional moralities, which are concerned with maintaining the cohesion of the hive through an us-versus-them mentality, this higher morality embraces humanity as a whole—a universal love that Buddhists call *metta* (the Greek/Christian concept of *agape* is similar). Whereas traditional morality pushes from behind, this higher morality appeals from in front. Great moral visionaries have never compelled their adherents through force of any kind, as their charisma gained them followers just by the goodness that they radiated (Siddhatta Gotama, Jesus, Kong Fuzi, and Martin Luther King are some of the more prominent examples). Complementing Bergson's idea of a higher morality based on universal love with Schopenhauer's focus on the alleviation of suffering through egolessness, we have something close to a Buddhist ethics. The only thing missing is a practical road map to moral goodness, which for Buddhists is the Noble 8-fold path.

The Noble 8-fold path can be subdivided into three categories: *Sila* or Morality (Right Speech, Right Actions, Right Livelihood); *Samadhi* or Mental Discipline/Meditation (Right Exercises, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration); and *Panna* or (Experiential) Wisdom (Right View and Right Thoughts). What is distinctive about Buddhist ethics compared to its Western counterparts is the addition of meditation to the classic dialectic of theory (*panna*) and practice (*sila*). This is exactly why *panna* is not really "wisdom" in the traditional sense of *theoria*. It is actually more akin to the Aristotelian notion of *phroenesis* (practical wisdom). The key point is that a complete morality is not possible without mental discipline—it is not just a matter of training oneself through habit (as Aristotle maintains) but getting at the root of our impulses through intensive meditation. This is how we are capable of transcending our narrow individuality and/or allegiance to the group to which we belong towards an embrace of all living beings.

The universal love (*metta*) aspired to by Buddhists is, needless to say, against our biological nature. We tend to care almost exclusively for the people and things in closest proximity to us. This is, in fact, the presentiment behind Carol Gilligan's

Ethics of Care. Gilligan rejects Kant's abstract formalism based on reason in favor of concrete emotions. At this, a Buddhist would have no quarrel. Where they diverge is in Gilligan's preferential treatment for the relationships that mean the most to us. Buddhism, in contrast, insists that our moral sensibilities should extend equally across all living things—not based on a categorical imperative but on a universal love akin to that described by Bergson. Again, this is not something that comes easily. The difficulty of applying *metta* expansively is summed up in the famous mandate to love one's enemy.

It is well known this is what Jesus asked us to do. But the radical nature of this injunction has typically been underappreciated. Just think of how impossible (almost offensive) it would seem to forgive and embrace the murderer of your child. This is exactly the message of the gospels. According to the Buddha, the only way to accomplish this almost impossible feat (at least for the vast majority of us) is through the practice of meditation. In contrast to Christians, who believe that faith is sufficient to acquire this kind of love, Buddhists insist it takes the hard work of mental discipline. Ironically, Nietzsche (the apotheosis of atheism) seems to understand the implications of the command to love one's enemies better than most Christians. Nietzsche at least understand that one must respect one's enemies before one can love them. However, with Nietzsche, it ends at respect—and at that; his respect is usually tinged with contempt from a sovereign height. Kant also remarks on the command to love one's enemy. The only way he can make sense of this is as a form of respect (practical love): he dismisses love based on sensibility as "pathological." In contrast, this is exactly the kind of love that Buddhists aim to cultivate. In addition, unlike Aristotle (who limits this kind of friendship to virtuous men) and Gilligan (who focuses care on those who most matter), the Buddha insists that *metta* should extend across the whole spectrum of living beings.

In everyday life, by and large, we choose who and what we care. Although we can care about a wide range of things, we care most about our fellow human beings. Kant understood this to be a function of our exclusive proprietorship of reason. Only a rational being can be found culpable for his or her actions. Those who we find utterly beneath us draw scant attention in terms of moral indignation: it is pointless to get angry at a dog for harming a child. Instead, we blame the adult human who *ought* to have been more responsible. Now if this adult were mentally impaired, this would also typically absolve him or her of responsibility (but in that case, they should not be in possession of a potentially dangerous animal). The point is that moral responsibility comes with the presupposition of rational agency (something Kant understood well). In addition, we tend to select as friends only those who we find worthy of esteem.

In modern capitalist societies, wealth allows individuals to be ever more selective about the company we keep. The hoi polloi can be kept at a distance, except insofar as they are relegated well-defined positions of servility. Furthermore, wealth allows people to revel in their power, participating in what Nietzsche calls "the right of the masters." So it is easy for the 1% to be gracious (even though so few of them are), as they are able to soar above the dialectical power games that structure human relationships. Still, unless one is utterly solitary (and Aristotle famously defined man as a political animal), other egos will always resist being reduced to mere objects in the solipsistic worlds of the affluent few. Moreover, even if you are one of the lucky ones blessed with riches, does that give you the right to use people as a mere means to your selfish ends? The obvious answer is "No!" As self-evident as this appears, using

people seems to be the *modus operandi* for the majority of us on a daily basis. As Schopenhauer well understood, the ego is imperious in its demands, and if an individual were given the choice between the destruction of the world and the destruction of his/her self, there is little doubt how most of us would choose. This is because trapped in the prison of separate individual consciousnesses; the destruction of the self is equivalent to the destruction of the world.

What Buddhists understand is that the idea of a separate individual consciousness is in fact what is illusory (despite Descartes' famous *cogito*). The apprehension of *anatta* (or non-self) follows from the experiential understanding of *anicca* (impermanence) that comes with meditation. The truth is that the separate self is an illusion, and we are all interconnected. However, this is a powerful illusion. It takes much hard work to dispel. Still, what more worthy endeavor is there in life? As Aristotle recognized, we are not born virtuous. We can become excellent human through practice—not just through habitual actions but also through the mental discipline that gets at the root of our underlying selfishness. The cultivation of saintliness (to use a historically loaded term) is accompanied by a genuine humility: if you see yourself as saintly, you are far from saintly. Humility is a function of the attenuation of the ego, which is equivalent to the development of moral goodness. Meditation enables one to generate love and compassion *for all*—even those whom others might designate as beneath them (it is not an accident that "inferior" human beings are often described as dogs).

Ironically, the only effective way of dissolving the self is to withdraw into the self. There are many post-moderns (I used to be one of them) who argue that the self can be disrupted by the transgression of limits (e.g. Georges Bataille, *Fight Club*). Nevertheless, the conscious attempts to dismantle ego integrity becomes a project that ultimately reestablishes the preeminence of the ego: one reasserts control over the situation (Bataille recognized this in the Marquis de Sade but failed to see that his own attempts fell into the same trap). Vipassana meditation, in contrast, does not aim at dissolving the self: the realization of *anatta* comes as a by-product of the experiential awareness of the impermanence of our sensations. Which finally brings us back to the topic of the body.

The individual interacts with the world through what Buddhists (along with Aldous Huxley and Jim Morrison) would call the six sense doors: vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mind. The sense door of mind is typically omitted in Western catalogs, which says something about how the West divorces the mind from the body. Buddhists, in contrast, recognize that they are inseparable. Regardless, the mind, like most of the other senses, presupposes a space between consciousness and the object of perception: the visual object is external to the perceiver, sound must travel as waves to the eardrum, the mental object (or *cogitatum*) is not identical to consciousness or *cogito* (even though it depends on it). Smell and taste are somewhat different (which explains Proust's predilection for these senses), but they depend on a chemical incorporation of the external stimuli that is also predicated on a divide between subject and object. Only touch is unmediated. Touch requires direct contact between subject and object that attests to a continuity of Being. During meditation, all the other senses are quieted: your eyes are closed, it is silent, you are not eating, strong perfumes are discouraged (despite the incongruous employment of incense by some), and the mind is calmed by focus on the breath. In this way, one can become acutely mindful of the sensation of touch. Normally, we are so distracted by the other senses that we overlook the variegated activities of our bodies at the cellular level.

Life is motion. While sitting silently, one becomes aware of how every cell of the body is responding to the contact between mind and matter. In this way, we realize that we are interconnected to all that is.

Socrates famously proclaimed that all evil was a result of ignorance. Socrates was right. What we are ignorant of is our interconnectedness to Being. Vipassana meditation dispels this ignorance (or *moha*). Without the normal filters in place to mediate our relationship to the world, we become vulnerable. We feel the pain of others as if it were our own—because it is. We can no longer pretend that we are invulnerable in our fortresses of solitude, outside of space and time in the realm of things-in-themselves, because to be embodied *is* to exist in space and time. The awareness of sensation during meditation (and extending outside it to "the real world") reminds us that everything is constantly in flux—including our "selves." The illusory sense of self comes from the five aggregates (*skandhas*): body, sensations, perceptions, consciousness, and mental habit patterns (*sankharas*). These heaps perpetuate the illusion of separate existence. However, they can be overcome through mental discipline. Heraclitus famously said that you cannot step into the same river twice (he was the one philosopher from the past that Nietzsche unequivocally admired). It is not only the river that is constantly in flux. You cannot step into the same river twice because neither the river nor "*you*" are identical moment to moment. Once you come to realize this, you are able to liberate yourself from the prison of the ego, and you are well on your way towards the happiness that comes with the experiential understanding of your interconnectedness to all that is.

DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY:

AGAINST WEST VERSUS THE REST

Hubert Hermans [*]

Abstract: Huimin Jin's article on cultural self-confidence is a welcome invitation to deliver a short commentary from a western point of view. My purpose is to show that in Western scientific publications of the past decades, there is an increasing interest in both the necessity and fertility of developing a dialogical self as part of a globalizing world society. In this context, I discuss (a) the dialogical self as an alternative to Western individualism (b) the origin of Dialogical Self Theory and some of its main tenets; and (c) tension between global and local positions; and (d) the necessity of recognizing the otherness and alterity of voices emerging from different cultures and selves. I show that recent developments in Western social sciences are well in agreement with some of Jin's main arguments on Chinese self-confidence.

In his plea for cultural self-confidence, Jin [1] proposes that identity is not something in itself, not an isolated entity and not something that is purely self-constructed or self-fulfilled. Instead, it is always "a structure, a discourse that has recourse to the other for its narrative to be completed". Only then, he continues, "the process of cultural self-confidence necessarily involves the way we deal with alien or heterogeneous cultures that have the potentials to position and reposition, shape and reshape, constitute and re-constitute ourselves."

In the past decades, a similar discussion has emerged in the social sciences in western countries concerning the question of how to define identity in a globalizing society. As part of this debate, the western ideal of the free and autonomous individual increasingly became the object of critical scrutiny. Under the influence of the autonomy ideal of the Enlightenment, a modern conception of self or identity was propagated that was assumed to function as a free and independent entity that could be defined and studied in separation of the social environment. Under the influence of this ideal, psychologists developed theories and concepts that considered the self as having an essence in themselves and having its own private ground in itself, with the social environment as something purely external. For sure, many psychologists acknowledge that the social environment has a significant influence on the self, but they persisted in the idea that the self could be defined as something that has a core essence in itself that can be studied in isolation of its social milieu. The many thousands of investigations of individual self-esteem are representative examples of this view.

One of the main critics of this 'container self', sociologist Peter Callero looked at some of the main trends in the psychology of the self in the 20th century. He listed and

---

[*] Dr. HUBERT HERMANS, Emeritus-professor of psychology at the Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.
[1] Huimin Jin (2017). "Cultural Self-confidence and Constellated Community: Centering around Xi Jinping's Recent Speeches," *Philosophical Studies* (Beijing), no. 4, pp. 119-126. All the quotations from this article are not paginated throughout the text.

analyzed a series of psychological self-concepts in contemporary mainstream psychology, for example, self-consistency, self-enhancement, self-monitoring, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-presentation, self-verification, self-knowledge, self-control, and self-handicapping. In his conclusion, he listed three features that these concepts had in common: (a) an emphasis on the stability of the self with a simultaneous under-emphasis of its change; (b) a stress on the unity of the self with a neglect of its multiplicity; (c) and a neglect of social power. In his own words: ". . . There is a tendency [in mainstream psychology] to focus on stability, unity, and conformity and de-emphasize the sociological principles of social construction. The self that is socially constructed may congeal around a relatively stable set of cultural meanings, but these meanings can *never be permanent or unchanging*. Similarly, the self that is socially constructed may appear centered, unified, and singular, but this symbolic structure will be as *multidimensional and diverse* as the social relationships that surround it. Finally, the self that is socially constructed is never a bounded quality of the individual or simple expression of psychological characteristics; it is a fundamentally social phenomenon, where concepts, images, and understandings are deeply determined by *relations of power*. When these principles are ignored or rejected, the self is often conceptualized as a vessel for storing all the particulars of a person." [2]

I. The Dialogical Self as Criticism of Western Individualism

Criticism of the individualistic bias in mainstream western psychological concepts of the Self was also foundational in the formulation of Dialogical Self Theory [3] (DST), a development in the social sciences emerging at the end of the 20th century as a reaction to the predominant individualism and rationalism in social-scientific western conceptions of the self. This theory weaves two concepts, self and dialogue, together in such a way that a more profound understanding of the interconnection of self and society becomes possible. Typically, the concept of self refers to something "internal," something that happens *within* the mind of the individual person, while "dialogue" is associated with something "external," referring to processes that take place *between* people involved in communication. The composite concept "dialogical self" goes beyond this dichotomy by bringing the external to the internal and, in reverse, to introduce the internal into the external. In this theory, the self represents a diversity of relationships between different "*I*-positions" and considers society as populated, stimulated, and renewed by dialogical individuals in development.

For a proper understanding of the dialogical self, a distinction between social and personal *I*-positions is required. *Social* positions (e.g., I as a teacher, as a father, as a leader), are similar to social roles as they are guided by social expectations regarding one's behavior in a societal context. There are also *personal* positions (e.g., I as

---

[2] Peter L. Callero (2003). The sociology of the self. *Annual Review of Sociology, 29,* p. 127. Italicized mine.
[3] Hubert Hermans & Harry Kempen (1992). The dialogical self: Beyond individualism and rationalism. *American Psychologist, 47*, 23-33. Hubert Hermans & Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka (2010). *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and counter-positioning in a globalizing society.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Hubert Hermans (2018). *Society in the self: A theory of identity in democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

humorous, I as lover of music of Bach, I as enthusiastic sportsman). This distinction enables the creation of personalized roles, in which social and personal positions are combined. For example, a teacher may present himself as a humorous teacher, a sophisticated teacher, an authoritarian teacher or a helpful teacher. In this way, social behavior receives a personal expression so that linkages between self and society are articulated. The self–society interconnection allows to abandon a conception of the self as essentialized and encapsulated in itself. Moreover, it avoids the limitations of a "self-less society" that lacks the opportunity to profit from the richness and creativity that the individual person has to offer to the innovation of existing social practices. Self and culture are conceived of in terms of a multiplicity of positions among which dialogical relationships can develop. This view conceptualizes the self as "culture-inclusive" and of culture as "self-inclusive". This conception avoids the pitfalls of treating the self as individualized and self-contained and culture as abstract and impersonal.

II. Dialogical Self Theory: Self as a Society of Mind

Dialogical Self Theory (DST) is not an isolated field in the social sciences. It emerged at the interface of two traditions: American Pragmatism and Russian Dialogism. As a theory of the self, it finds a source of inspiration in William James'[4] and George Herbert Mead's[5] classic formulations on the workings of the self. As a dialogical theory, it draws on the fertile insights in dialogical processes proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin[6]. In the course of time, the ideas of these authors have significantly contributed to the development of Dialogical Self Theory. However, we went beyond these authors by constructing a theory, which gives serious consideration to the idea that we are part of significant historical changes on a *global* scale.

In line with Peter Callero's vision, I would like to emphasize that there are in the self not only stable but also changing positions. There is not only unity in the self (centralizing movements) but also multiplicity (decentralizing movements represented by a diversity of positions, which have their own specific energies and developmental trajectories); and the organization of the positions is indeed deeply determined by differences in social power. Taking these characteristics into account leads to a definition of the self as a mini-society of *I*-positions, which function, at the same time, as integrative parts of the society at large.

At this point, we see a close connection between the dialogical self as a dynamic mini-society of mind and Jin's proposal of cultural self-confidence: "And if cultural self-confidence not only means insistence on one's own tradition but also absorption of the nutrients from other cultures in order to better survive and thrive, then it has something to do with inter-culturality, inter-subjectivity or cultural inter-subjectivity". In a complementing way, I would suggest that if personal confidence not only means insistence on one's own past behavior but also absorption of the nutrients from the selves of other people in order to better survive and thrive, then it has something to do

---

[4] William James (1890). *The Principles of Psychology* (Volume 1). London: Macmillan.

[5] George Herbert Mead (1934). *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[6] Mikhail Bakhtin (1973). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (2nd edn.; trans. R. W. Rotsel). Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis. (Original work published 1929 as *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* [*Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*]).

with inter-subjectivity and cultural-intersubjectivity". In this context, a well-developed dialogical self would serve as a fitting complement to a dialogical society as proposed by Jin.

In Jin's view, the self can never exist without reference to the other. It has to be found not in self-centeredness but self-in-other, or in Confucian terminology, "correspondence in difference" (和而不同), "by which a culturally constellated community is achieved otherness or alterity." Closely related to this view, DST assumes that significant other people or groups of people are not located purely outside the self, but are interiorized as "others-in-the-self." As populated by other individuals and groups, the self functions as a "society of mind". In this mini-society the self is a "self-in-other" and the others are "others-in-the-self" with the other working as "another" *in* the organization of the self. Significant others or groups of others may be represented in the self as more or less dominant or powerful others that function in the self as models, guides, authorities or as inspiring figures that organize the self of the individual person.

Moreover, the Confusion "correspondence in difference" fits with a conception of the self as "unity-in-multiplicity" or "multiplicity-in-unity" as typical of the dialogical self in DST. As such, the self exists as a multiplicity of *I*-positions , which function in coherent way, due to the quality of the dialogical relationships between different *I*-positions in the self and between the *I*-positions of different selves as constituting the society at large. [7]

III. Tensions between Global and Local Traditions

In a globalizing world society, individuals and groups are no longer located in one particular culture, homogeneous in itself and contrastingly set against other cultures, but are increasingly located at the interfaces of cultures. [8] The growing interconnectedness of nations and cultures does not only lead to an increasing contact between different cultural groups but also to an increasing contact between cultures within the individual person. Different cultures come together and meet each other as *I*-positions within the self of one and the same individual. This process may result in such novel identities as a business representative educated in a German school system but working for a Chinese company; English-speaking employees living in India but giving technical training courses via the Internet to adolescents in the United States; Algerian women participating in an international football competition but afterward praying in a mosque; and a scientist with university training in Syria desperately looking for a job as an immigrant in Great Britain. The focus here is on intercultural processes that lead to the formation of a multiplicity of cultural positions or voices coming together in the self of a single individual. Such positions or voices may become engaged in mutual negotiations, agreements, disagreements, tensions, and

---

[7] Hubert Hermans & Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka (2010). *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and counterpositioning in a globalizing society.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
[8] Arjun Appadurai (1990). "Disjuncture and difference in the Global Cultural Economy." In Mike Featherstone (Ed.), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* (pp. 295–310). London: Sage. Hubert Hermans & Harry Kempen (1998). "Moving Cultures: The Perilous Problems of Cultural Dichotomies in a Globalizing World." *American Psychologist, 53*, 1111–1120.

conflicts (e.g., "As an Italian I'm used to giving my direct opinion in a situation of disagreement with my colleagues but in the Indian company where I work now, I discovered that it is better to be respectful"). These examples have in common that different cultural voices are involved in various kinds of dialogical relationships and producing positive or negative meanings in fields of uncertainty. In other words, the global–local nexus is not a reality separated from the individual mind but rather functions as a constituent of a dialogical self in action.

The dynamic relationship between the global and the local is even visible in studies of the process of civilization. Global system scientist W. Shäfer argued that not too long ago the big picture of human history showed a small number of large civilizations and large number of small local cultures. However, since a techno-scientific civilization has begun to cover the globe, the big picture today has been changed dramatically. We are increasingly living in a global civilization with many local cultures: "a deterritorialized ensemble of networked techno-scientific practices with global reach". (Shäfer, 2004, 81) The Internet provides crucial evidence for the emergence of such a global civilization. However, Shäfer added that despite the fact that the Internet has a worldwide reach, it remains local at all points. User terminals are the places where global connections and local cultures interact. This implies that information and knowledge emerging on a global scale are always transformed and adapted so that they fit with the needs of people in their local situation.

This treatment of the local and the global is in line with Jin's quotations from Huntington's work: "In the years to come, there won't emerge a single universal culture but instead many different cultures and civilizations that will have to live side by side", and therefore "the global politics will certainly become multipolar and multicultural". In addition, a visionary outlook at the future world is expressed in the quotation: "What I expect is that the attention I have called to the danger of clashes between civilizations will, throughout the world, promote "the dialogues among civilizations".

IV. Recognition of Otherness and Alterity

In a decisive way, Jin states that the self can never exist without reference to otherness or alterity. In a similar way, a dialogical self does not work without otherness and alterity. The potential of dialogue goes beyond the familiar situation of two people in conversation. Participants involved in conversation may express and repeat their own view without recognizing and incorporating the view of the other in their exchange. Innovative dialogue exists when the participants are able and willing to recognize the alterity of the other party in its own right. Furthermore, dialogue is innovative if they are able and willing to revise and change their initial standpoints in the direction of new and commonly constructed points of view.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle [9] argued that at the higher levels of communication, the other is experienced "alter ego". The other is like myself (ego), but at the same time, he or she is not like myself (alter). Dealing with differences in a globalizing world requires the capacity to recognize and respond to the other person or group in its alterity. As a central feature of well-developed dialogue, alterity is a necessity in a world in which individuals and cultures are confronted with differences,

---

[9] Aristotle (1954). *Ethica Nicomachea* [Nicomachean ethics] (trans. R.W. Thuijs). Antwerp: De Nederlandse Boekhandel.

which may not be comprehensible at the start but may become intelligible and meaningful as the result of dialogical interchange.

The recognition of otherness in the self is one of the aspects of the post-modern self that is of central importance to the dialogical self. The notion of otherness, including the other-in-the-self, gives access to the ethical implications of alterity. The alterity of the other is acknowledged if the actual other and the other-in-the-self are approached and appreciated from their own point of view, history, and particularity of experience. Expanding on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Cooper and Hermans [10] (2007) have proposed that in a well-developed dialogical self, not only the alterity of the positions of the actual other are appreciated, but also the alterity of the other positions in the self. Alterity in the communication between cultural groups or between countries should not be considered in isolation from alterity in the communication of the person with the diversity of *I*-positions in the self. Indeed, other-alterity and self-alterity, like self and other are mutually inclusive.

Summarizing

Dialogical Self Theory considers the self as a dynamic multiplicity of *I*-positions that are organized in a ''society of mind''. As focused on dialogical relationships both between individuals, groups, and cultures, and within different *I*-positions in the self, this theory represents a protest against any west versus the rest ideology. As such, it can be seen as a complement to Jin's plea for cultural self-confidence in contemporary globalizing society.

References

Appadurai, Arjun. 1990. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," In Mike Featherstone (Ed.), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* (pp. 295–310). London: Sage. Hubert Hermans & Harry Kempen. 1998.

Aristotle. 1954. *Ethica Nicomachea* [Nicomachean ethics] (trans. R.W. Thuijs). Antwerp: De Nederlandse Boekhandel.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1973. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (2nd edn.; trans. R. W. Rotsel). Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis.

Callero, Peter L. 2003. "The Sociology of the Self." *Annual Review of Sociology,* 29, 2003.

Cooper, Mick & Hermans, Hubert. 2007. "Honoring self-otherness: Alterity and the intrapersonal. " In Livia Simão & Jaan Valsiner (Eds*.*), *Otherness in Question: Labyrinths of the Self* (pp. 305–15). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Hermans, Hubert & Kempen, Harry. 1992. "The Dialogical Self: Beyond Individualism and Rationalism." *American Psychologist,* 47, 23-33, 1992.

Hermans, Hubert & Hermans-Konopka, Agnieszka. 2010. *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-positioning in a Globalizing Society.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hermans, Hubert. 2018. *Society in the Self: A Theory of Identity in Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

---

[10] Mick Cooper & Hubert Hermans (2007). "Honoring Self-otherness: Alterity and the Intrapersonal. " In Livia Simão & Jaan Valsiner (Eds*.*), *Otherness in Question: Labyrinths of the Self* (pp. 305–15). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

James, William. 1890. *The Principles of Psychology* (Volume 1). London: Macmillan.
Mead, George Herbert. 1934. *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Shäfer, W. 2004. "Global Civilization and Local Cultures: A Crude Look at the Whole." In S.
A. Arjomand & E. A. Tiryakian (Eds.), *Rethinking Civilizational Analysis*. London: Sage.