

# Plural Subjects V.

# A New Perspective on Self-Alienation

# Content

- The Standard Account: Selfhood as social role play (being a person)
- How we are **not** ourselves in our social roles: the Paradox of Role Identification (Heidegger and Sartre on inauthenticity).
- Being ourselves in our social roles: A perspective on authentic role play (the Politics of Knowing Ourselves, plurally).

# What is a Social Role?

- Roles are the core infrastructure of the social world.
- A role is the social status of an actor (e.g., student, professor, parent etc.). The social status of an actor is a system of rights (entitlements) which the actor is collectively accepted to have, and duties (commitments) to which the actor is collectively normatively expected to conform. Personhood is the meta-role (the status of an actor who is recognized as a suitable target of normative expectations and thus an actual or potential player of specific roles).
- Collective normative expectations are generalized shared attitudes that have a “world-to-mind (-to-norm)” direction of fit, that are person-focused, and that are “counterfactually stabilized” (rationally immune to disconfirmation).

# A Received View on Selfhood

- **Early social psychology:** selfhood comes from other people's views of oneself (e.g., Cooley's "looking glass self"); symbolic interactionism (Mead): the "I" (pre-social self, source of spontaneity) differs from the "me" (social status), but they can be "fused", or at least "balanced".
- **Current philosophical mainstream (social externalism, normative pragmatism, theory of communicative action, practice theory):** selfhood involves intentional attitudes with (propositional) content. This requires a community of agents who recognize each others as persons (competent and responsible cognizers), or even a linguistic practice with mutual "score keeping" of entitlements and commitments; acting requires "forms of action", which are constituted by social norms. There is no action to speak of outside of a system of social norms.

# Conventionalism about Selfhood

If having intentional attitudes is a social status, and if even a minimal conception of selfhood involves having intentional attitudes, selfhood is a social status. Any sense of self is a social role. Being oneself is playing a social role.

# Heidegger – a Conventionalist?

Some quotes from Heidegger's analysis can be construed as saying that the "anyone" pervades **all** of our being-there (is necessary for any disclosedness of the world). The "anyone" is constitutes social roles (being oneself is basically being "one-self").

Dreyfus, Brandom, Haugeland etc. ("the conventionalists"): social normativity and rules are constitutive of being-there. Being-there is a social status. However, Heidegger clearly states that the role self ("one-self") is inauthentic, and that inauthenticity is primary, but not without alternative.

Adapting some pieces of standard social role theory, this is construed by some conventionalists merely as saying that competent ("expert") role players need some role distance (knowing how to apply the rules, when to deviate, ability to mediate competently in the case of role conflicts etc.).

# Heidegger's Anti-Conventionalism

According to Heidegger (and Sartre), being oneself and playing a role are in a sort of fundamental tension (beyond role distance). Playing any role seems to involve a fundamental self-misapprehension or self-misunderstanding.

The view of oneself as “one-self” is correct in that it is of oneself one conceives of “one-self”, but it is mistaken in that it fails to grasp its being (cf. BT § 4). Being oneself – in the sense of knowing oneself/living one's life as one's own – is not being “one-self” and playing a series of social roles.

Claims:

- There is an important and very fundamental insight in this view that is lost in the conventionalist interpretation.
- This claim can be cashed out in non-Heideggerian jargon.
- Role theory is a good place to start.



# Some Role Theory

**Roles don't play themselves. We have to play them.**

This involves **role engagement**.

Role engagement consists of:

- **Role knowledge:** knowing and understanding the system of commitments and entitlements that is the role status.
- **Role acceptance:** having a pro-attitude of some sort towards the role in question.
- **Role identification:** relating to the role in question **as one's own**.

# What is Role Identification?

Role identification entails an attitude of a particular kind. To use the example of one of my own roles:

- I may know exactly what commitments and entitlements are involved in being a professor of Political and Social Philosophy at the University of Vienna, I may like to be in that position, and still not know that I am in that position.
- No amount of observational, inferential, third-personal knowledge about the holder of the status of professor of Political and Social Philosophy at the University of Vienna constitutes the knowledge in question.
- Rather, role identification involves first-personal knowledge, or self-awareness, or self-consciousness. First-personal knowledge is non-observational, non-inferential and “groundless”.

# Groundless self-“knowledge”

Groundless self-“knowledge” establishes our **identity** (existence rather than essence) as ours. It is the feature in virtue of which even a self-misconception is *of ourselves* (cf. Heidegger’s view of Dasein’s self-misconception).

Groundless self-“knowledge” is the feature in virtue of which our attitudes are our **commitments** (cf. Heidegger’s “resolve”; cf. the current discussion on Moore’s paradox).

Groundless self-“knowledge” is the feature in virtue of which there is first-person **authority** (cf. Heidegger: the basic way in which Dasein relates to itself is neither cognitive [it is not regular knowledge] nor volitive, but rather affective [Befindlichkeit]).

The feature in question explains a core concept of selfhood: the kind of self-relation that **is** the self (cf. BT § 4) (→ **self-identity**).

# Self-Identity vs. Role Identity

<b>Self-Identity</b>	<b>Role Identity</b>
Self-identity is self-ascertained/self-established/self-determined (the relation to itself constitutes the self).	Role identity is socially pre-determined (the social norms constitute the role status)
In virtue of self-identity, only one's own attitudes are one's commitments.	In virtue of role identity, one is committed by other people's generalized normative expectations.
Self-identity is the authority of the first person: self-authorization.	Role identity is societal authority: authorization by status

# The Paradox of Role Identification

Self-identity is not role identity.

In virtue of role identification, role identity requires us to self-identify with an identity that is not *ours*. Playing a social role implies identifying first-personally with a social status that is not what we are first-personally. This is an everyday sense of “how we are not ourselves”.

This contradiction between self-identity in terms of groundless self-“knowledge” and role identity is at the core of Heidegger’s notion of **inauthenticity**.

Conventional theories of selfhood cannot account for this feature of role play, as they have no account of self-identity.

# Not All Role Identities are Inauthentic!

In many cases, the claim that role identification comes at the cost of a life that is not lived “as one’s own” seems intuitively plausible.

In other cases, however, this claim does not seem to appeal to our intuitions at all.

Examples for the former case: Sartre’s waiter who takes his identity to be “given” by his status in the normative framework; a “nonconformist” who swims against the mainstream no matter what the normative guidelines are.

Examples for the latter case: a good friend, a responsible and engaged citizen, a devoted philosophy professor.

→ How can the paradox of role identification be solved (for the latter cases)?

# Reconciling Self- and Role-Identity

Three steps:

1. An account of joint action
2. A joint action-based theory of social norms
3. An notion of self-identity that includes social norms (**Plural** self-identity qua plural pre-reflective self-awareness).

# 1. Joint Action

Complex **individual actions** presuppose that the agent who intends to act is committed to carrying out the various steps involved in the action.

**Joint action** is **socially extended** in the same way as complex individual action is **temporally extended**: the intention to act jointly presupposes some commitment to a distribution of individual contributions (e.g., intending to prepare a sauce hollandaise by you pouring the oil and me stirring the mix): **being committed to some plan**.

The plan sets a **normative guideline** for the joint action.



## 2. Social Norms

Social norms are standardizations of individual contributions to repeated joint actions. They determine **proto-roles**.

Typically, however, norms emerge from a previously reached, more or less coincidental equilibrium rather than from an agreed-upon plan: the “ought” of “our way of doing it” emerges from the “is” of the first distribution and regulates future cases.

The normatively stabilized coincidental equilibrium may not be a particularly good equilibrium.

“Better” norms can issue from joint reasoning about how best to live together. This is an important driving force in social, resulting in changes of “practice forms” and social roles.

# 3. Plural Self-Identity

A “Heidegger-friendly” version of the claim that self-identity is not only singular, but plural, too:

Being-there is its potentialities.

Joint action opportunities (activities that involve coordination) are “potentialities”, but they are potentialities that no individual has for him- or herself. They are collective rather than distributive.

One way of relating to these potentialities is to take them to be pre-determined by existing social standards or “forms of action” (which can then only be followed or violated).

Another way of relating to them is to see them as what they truly are: always open to new ways of actualizing them together.

The being that is aware of the way in which such potentialities are open to self-determination is not an individual being-there, but a collective being-there. As individuals, we can only follow or violate social norms. As collectives, we can choose to change them.

# Authentic Role Play

Role play is authentic insofar as the norms constituting my individual role issue from a community of which I am a member, and insofar as we know (in the right way) the normative infrastructure of our shared life as being *ours*, collectively: **plural pre-reflective self-awareness**.

Identifying with this role is not paradoxical: social norms are **external** to our **singular self-identities**, but **internal** to our **plural self-identity**.

Role play is inauthentic insofar as plural pre-reflective self-identity is not reflectively transparent: the agents do not identify (in the right way) with the plural self-identity from which the norms issue, thereby taking the potentialities he or she has **together with others** as externally predetermined rather than for what they truly are: up to **us** (collectively).

# Summary L I-V

- Collective intention(ality) (CI) is basic for social reality.
- In the debate on CI, content-accounts compete with mode- and subject-accounts. Each type of account has its problems.
- The problems with the received subject accounts come from a mistaken conception of subjectivity.
- Subjectivity is the feature in virtue of which intentional attitudes self-identify, self-validate, self-commit and self-authorize.
- Plural subjectivity is plural self-identification, self-validation, self-commitment and self-authorization.
- Plural subjects are not collective individual subjects.

# Summary L I-V

- Plural pre-reflective self-awareness is the feature in virtue of which random collections can be collectively responsible.
- One source of self-alienation is reflective ignorance of plural pre-reflective self-awareness. A condition of the possibility of being true to ourselves in our social roles is our reflective knowledge of what we are in virtue of our plural pre-reflective self-awareness: plural reflective self-transparency.

# Texts

- “The Subject of ‘We Intend’”
- “Collective Responsibility of Random Collections”
- “Authentic Role Play”