Abstracts:

‘Aristotle and the Cartesian Self’

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It is uncontroversial that Aristotle has a theory of self. What each of us is most of all, Aristotle thinks, is our intellect (*nous*). What is controversial is whether Aristotle’s theory of intellectual selfhood implies, or is compatible with, what we might call a Cartesian self or ‘I’: a unique, non-bodily, conscious subject who is essentially a reflexive locus of first-personal experience and personality. I argue in this paper that the answer to the question is ‘yes’. To show this, I analyse both Aristotle and Descartes’ metaphysical accounts of selfhood in some depth and argue that they share more than has commonly been recognised. For both thinkers, I claim, the self is essentially a substance separable from the body, amnestic, passionless, and the source of deliberated decisions. Moreover, both thinkers face the problem of explaining how such selves can be individuated. After elucidating this individuation problem, I go on to argue that Aristotle’s account of concept acquisition provides an implicit causal criterion for distinguishing individual selves (e.g., in hypothetical cases of ‘body swapping’) that is lacking in Descartes. Aristotle’s implicit criterion, I claim, is: a self *S* is identical to a self *R* if and only if the first-actuality doxastic and intellectual contents of the intellect of *S* and the intellect of *R* share the same concept acquisition history. I go on to defend the idea that Descartes, in denying that external epistemic or doxastic modifications individuate one *res cogitans* from another, has no obvious criterion for distinguishing *S* from *R*. I conclude that Aristotle’s account of intellectual selfhood is, unlike Descartes’, capture what we think of as most essential to us as individual persons.

‘Descartes on Subjects and Selves’

**Vili Lähteenmäki,** *University of Helsinki*

Descartes is commonly associated with the so called early modern turn inwards. The Cartesian self is taken to relate to most of the features in virtue of which it is considered a human being and a moral agent in the same way as it relates to features of the external world. His view of the self has been labeled minimalist, disengaged, and punctual.

Several of the premises behind minimalism have been challenged in the scholarship. Most notably, it has been pointed out that for Descartes the mind-body union is primitive and has its own true nature. Many interpret non-reducibility of the union to its constituents to mean that the union, rather than the mind, forms the Cartesian self.

But Descartes is a systematic thinker, and an account of an embodied self cannot be complete without an account of how it fares with Descartes’ undeniably minimalist commitment that the thinking self is an immaterial substance with no bodily element. Descartes should be able to say that a pure intellectual perception (which entails no body) is a self’s thought in the same sense of “self” as a sensory perception (which does entail the body) is a self’s thought.

My talk addresses this issue. It first observes that the referent of ‘I’ cannot be fully determined within the confines of Descartes’ metaphysical framework, because the union defies the standards he holds for a metaphysical explanation (Simmons 2017). This means that we can’t compare the mind and the union as candidates for the Cartesian self through seeking an apprehension of their essences. It then observes that for Descartes ‘I’ always picks out the subject of experience, regardless of whether the subject understands what it, metaphysically, picks out. The question to ask then is how a mind and a human body are amalgamated as the subject of experience takes itself to be a moral agent with a history and future aims—which surely involves purely intellectual thoughts, sensory thoughts, episodic memories, etc.

The view put forth is that the body-dependent features partaking in what and who one takes herself to be are in the end a matter of representation. It is furthermore argued that embodied self-presence is on a par with purely intellectual self-presence, because the latter is likewise a matter of representation: i.e., the mechanism of self-presence is the same in both. Thoughts are indeed constitutive of selfhood, but not because they ontologically belong to the thinking substance as its modifications but rather in virtue of conveying content that affects what we take ourselves to be.

‘The Stoics on Perceiving Other Selves’

**Simon Shogry,** *Brasenose College, University of Oxford*

Our ancient sources make clear that the Stoics identify the self with the soul, not with the body or the soul-body compound. More specifically, the self is the mind, or the ‘ruling’ part of the soul. Scholars have rightly seen that this theory of the self underwrites the shape of Stoic axiology: the Stoics think that, since they do not benefit the self *qua*mind, things like bodily health and financial success are not goods. In this talk, however, I focus on the less familiar Stoic claim that the moral condition of the self can be directly perceived. The Stoics think it is possible, at least for certain experts, to perceptually detect virtue or vice in others and also their character-traits such as courage, cowardice, or irascibility. Here the Stoics reject a weaker Platonic claim, that the condition of the soul can be indirectly inferred on the basis of the condition of the body. For the Stoics, the expert is not *inferring* that another self is e.g. cowardly or irascible, but directly *perceiving* these conditions through the movements and form of the other. I will explain how Stoic metaphysics opens up the possibility of perceiving other selves, and indicate the relevance of this claim for the Stoic account of erotic expertise. It is specifically the expert in *loving* who is able to perceptually detect character from form, and to use these discriminations to select an erotic partner who is especially likely to become virtuous. So the Stoic theory of the self is not only relevant for understanding their axiology but also their account of love and moral improvement.

‘The Morality of the Desire for Esteem: Gassendi and the Augustinian Challenge’

**Andreas Blank,** *Alpen-Adria Universität Klagenfurt*

Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) has not been perceived as one of the early modern philosophers who had something interesting to say about the role of the desire for esteem in social life and the moral duties connected with this desire. Nevertheless, in his *Animadversiones in decimum librum Diogenis Laertii* (1649) there are some scattered, but interrelated remarks about how the desire for esteem could be supportive of civic virtue. These remarks were written during the years when Jansenism became a considerable intellectual force in France, and the specific strengths of Gassendi's approach to the desire for esteem can be seen when it is read against this background. In the second volume of *Augustinus* (1640), Cornelius Jansen comments upon Augustine's objections to the moral value of striving for esteem. According to these objections, striving for esteem is an expression of a deeply distorted attitude toward the self: an attitude characterized by concupiscence, which desires all things for one's own sake rather than for the sake of God. Contextualizing Gassendi's remarks against the Augustinian challenge is made plausible by two circumstances: The Augustinian challenge with respect to the desire for esteem contains explicit criticism of Epicurean ethics; and Gassendi responded to Augustine's central charge that, in desiring temporal goods such as esteem, one confuses things that are useful with things that should be enjoyed.

‘Augustine on Self-Knowledge and the Mind’

**Tamer Nawar,** *University of Groningen*

Augustine, whose views on these matters have often been compared to those of Descartes, is often thought to mark an important departure from ancient accounts of self-knowledge and the mind. In this paper, I clarify Augustine's views on self-knowledge and the mind and examine the extent to which his views do in fact differ from those of earlier Neoplatonic and Stoic philosophers.

‘“For the Depths of his own Heart are Inscrutable to him” – Kant’s Skepticism Regarding Self-Knowledge of our Moral Motives’

**Ursula Renz,** *University of Graz*

Among of the most peculiar traits of Kant’s critical philosophy is the contention that while we can know our moral maxims and can thus reflect on our actions from a moral point of view, we cannot really know whether, in a given situation, our actions are actually motivated by those maxims. This means that although we have a firm sense of our moral duties, we can never be certain whether some particular action of ours is done from duty or just in accordance with it. This view is voiced in several of Kant’s writings. Most prominent is its appearance in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, but we also find it in *Religion within the Boundaries of mere Reason*. This suggests that although the fundamental rationale of this view derives from the systematic framework of Kant’s critical philosophy, it also expresses some of Kant’s views on the human condition. It is against this background that, in this paper, I revisit Kant’s remarks on the lack of self-knowledge regarding the motives of our proper actions. Reading Kant’s views in light of an Augustinian legacy, on which it is a constitutive feature of the human condition that we are at the same time present to and hidden from ourselves, I will attribute to Kant the view that man’s moral self-relation is shaped in an irreducible way by both self-consciousness and of self-ignorance.