

Self-Feeling

What today's philosophy of emotion can contribute to problems of self-consciousness

"Gnōthi seautón – Know thyself!" is a long-standing ideal in philosophy. In this tradition, there has been a vivid debate on problems of self-consciousness and self-knowledge in the last years. How do we know what we want or believe? How do we know ourselves?

I argue that contemporary attempts to address these questions struggle with significant problems. Reflective, higher-order accounts (i.e. Rosenthal 2005) arguably lead into infinite regresses and thus fail to fully explain the phenomenon. Pre-reflective, same-order accounts (i.e. Frank 2012; Zahavi 2005) tend to describe the phenomenon "ex negativo" and thus contribute little to a positive understanding of the phenomenon.

In my talk I propose a fresh perspective on these issues: I explore if self-consciousness can be understood as pre-reflective, pre-propositional, bodily feeling. Could it be a "self-feeling"? Recent developments in the philosophy of emotion support this move. They show that deep, existential feelings fundamentally shape all our experience and thought (i.e. Ratcliffe 2008).

Such an account of self-feeling would allow to shed new light on pressing problems of self-consciousness. A feeling provides rich phenomenal content. It feels like something to be myself. This affective, bodily experience could moderate the problem that traditional, pre-reflective models suffer from. At the same time, it may provide a foundation for reflective thoughts about myself and thus includes the merits of reflective, higher-order accounts without falling prey to their shortcomings.