



Lesson 2: Philosophical and Sciences Viewpoints on Self

Sustainable Development Goals:

SDG 3- Good Health & Well-Being

SDG 4- Quality Education

SDG 11- Sustainable Cities and Communities

SDG 17- Partnerships for the Goal

Learning Objectives:

1. Discuss the different philosophical s as well as natural and social sciences standpoints about the self;
2. Analyze the relevance of these standpoints to your sense of self, and
3. Synthesize and evaluate the different perspectives of self.

Learning Materials:

Objects, devices, tech gadgets, or real objects for content presentation or student activity

Lesson Preview/Review

Social, Environment and Other Life Factors (S.E.L.F.)

Overview

This module highlights how classical, modern, and natural, social sciences defined the self.

Concept Notes/Teacher-Led Discussion

Philosophy of the Self

Philosophy is often called the mother of all disciplines simply because all fields of the study began as philosophical discourses. Ancient philosophers attempted to explain natural and social phenomena, coming up with their own definitions of how the world works and what factors contribute to such phenomena. Thus, it was inevitable to come up with various conceptions of what it means to be human, and in so doing, the different definitions of the self.

The **self** has been defined as “a unified being, essentially connected to consciousness, awareness, and agency”. Different philosophers introduced specific characteristics and meanings of the self, which, over time, transformed from pure abstractions to explanations that hold scientific proofs.

Classical Antiquity

The ancient philosophy of the self be traced back from one of 147 Greek aphorisms prominently inscribed in the temple of Apollo at Delphi-*know thyself*. This aphorism was Socrate’s guiding principle that he imparted to his students. Since Socrates as a guru preferred to engage his students in endless discussions, it is said that he had never written down any of his ideas but instead untiringly articulated concepts and principles with his students. Socrates believed that the real self is not the physical body, but rather the *psyche*. He further posited that the appearance of the body is inferior to its functions.





It was Plato, Socrate’s prized student, who thoroughly expounded on Socrate’s ideas of the self. Plato’s conceptualization of the self was profoundly introduced in his dialogue, *Phaedrus*, which has been a popular text for many decades in the subject of philosophy. The main idea in this dialogue is that the truth can be distinguished in two forms: the **metaphysical** realm and the **physical** world. Plato suggested that the self is fundamentally an intellectual entity whose nature exists independent from the physical world. Plato bifurcated the truth or reality into two: the **ontos**, the ultimate reality which tends to be permanent and spiritual, and the **phenomena** which refers to the manifestation of the ideal. Compared to ontos, phenomena is imperfect, impermanent, and inferior.

Plato’s idea of truth about the human was even more expounded and formalized the separation of the ideal and phenomenal existence or being. Aristotle suggested that the ideal is subsumed in the phenomena. Aristotle called the ideal as **essence** and the phenomena as **matter**. He also emphasized that the two co-exist and are co-dependent; the essence provides meaning and purpose to the matter, and the matter provides substance and solidity to essence.

The philosophy of the self has been defined through two distinct lens: **empiricism** and **rationalism**. In empiricism, there is no such thing as innate knowledge; instead, knowledge is derived from experience- either perceived with the five senses or processed with the brain. One knows things because he or she has experienced in through sensory and bodily responses. On the other hand, rationalism argues that there is innate knowledge; however, there are different sources of innate knowledge. Rationalism explains self from the standpoint of what is “ideal” and “true”, and not rooted in what is felt by the senses or body. Conclusions are derived through logic and reasoning. Some philosophers applied empirical views of the self; others used the rational.

From classical antiquity to the contemporary era, philosophy of the self has evolved. From the teachings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, renaissance and contemporary philosophers also defined the self-according to personal and historical contexts. As stated by Fromm, “You can only understand humans in the context of their history.” This line is appropriate is understanding how philosophers have shaped their own viewpoints of the self. The ancient philosophers explained the self from their conceptual understanding of the world since scientific evidence was hard to obtain due to the lack of measures. Contemporary philosophers, meanwhile, have incorporated science to their theories in the light of the technological advancements that they have been exposed to.

Towards Modern Philosophy

Socrates and Plato have explained the self from a theoretical and logical orientation. Aristotle was an empiricist, deriving views of the self from physical and scientific underpinnings. St. Augustine incorporated the views of Plato to his religious philosophy. John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant were empiricist philosophers; while Rene Descartes was a dominant rational philosopher during the Middle Ages. Among contemporary philosophers, majority are empiricist: Gilbert Ryle, Patricia Churchland, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty have incorporated biological and neuroscience in their philosophies.

The varying philosophical standpoints can thus be summarized as follows:

Philosopher	Orientation	Philosophy	Description
Classical Antiquity			





Socrates	Idealism	Socratic Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge is the personification of good while ignorance is that of evil.• Self-Knowledge is the ultimate virtue. As ultimate virtue, it will lead to ultimate happiness.
Plato	Idealism	Dualism and Idealism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moral virtue is rooted in the intellect and leads to happiness.• Wisdom and knowledge lead to virtue which will lead to happiness.
Aristotle	Empiricist	Aristotelian Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ideal is found inside the phenomena and the universals inside the particulars.• Ideal are ESSENCE and phenomena is MATTER.• Matter has no form. Essence has no mass.• Matter and Essence need each other.
Middle Ages			
St. Augustine	Platonism	Neoplatonism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All knowledge leads to God.• Only the pure in heart can see God.• Love of God, faith in Him, and understanding of His Gospel



			will ultimately lead to happiness.
Renaissance			
Rene Descartes	Rationalist	Mind-Body Dualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I think, therefore, I a.”• The mind and soul can exist without the body.• Establishing the distinction of soul from the body can make people believe in the afterlife and the soul’s immortality.
John Locke	Empiricist	Theory of Personal Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is in consciousness alone that identity exists, not in the body and soul.• There id a distinction between man and person.• The soul may change, but consciousness remains intact.
David Hume	Empiricist	Skeptical Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All knowledge passes through the senses.• Separate ideas can be joined in the mind.• There is no self, only a bundle of perceptions.
Immanuel Kant	Rationalist/ Empiricist	Metaphysics of the Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reason is the final authority of morality.• There is inner self and outer self.• The inner self includes rational



			<p>reasoning and psychological state.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The outer self includes the body and physical mind, where representation occurs.
Modern Times			
Gilbert Ryle	Empiricist	The Concept of Mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I act, therefore, I am.”• The mind is not the seat of self. It is not a separate, parallel thing to our physical body.• The mind is a category mistake, brought about by habitual use. The only way it can affect the other is through the external world.
Patricia Churchland	Empiricist	Neurophilosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A fully matured neuroscience will eliminate the need for beliefs since “they are not real.”• The physical brain gives us a sense of self.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty	Existentialist Empiricist	Phenomenology of Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Both empiricism and intellectualism are flawed in nature.• “We are our bodies.”• Our bodily experiences do not detach the



			subject/object, mind/body, rational/irrational.
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The table shows how philosophers view the self from different standpoints. It must be remembered that in studying the theories about the self, one should take into account the philosopher’s orientation and historical background. Many other scholars study and explain the self. Through their ideas, you may examine yourself and determine whether you fit into the given descriptions.

Scientific Perspective of the Self

Science has invested much of its efforts in understanding world phenomena, especially in explaining how basic life forms have evolved to more complex organisms, such as human beings. Science is defined as the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment. Scientific approaches to the study of the self are classified into two: physical sciences and social sciences. The former focuses on biological factors that make up the human body, the underlying growth and maturational mechanism, and environmental influences, that contribute to human development, the central focus of which is the self. On the other hand, social sciences are concerned with institutions, cultures, and the interpersonal relationships of people living within society.

Biological/Physiological Science

Science has made great advances in explaining human beings. Beginning with the tenets of Aristotle and his scientific approach to the study of human experience, to evolution by natural selection posed by Charles Darwin, human development, individuality, and the self have been defined, described, and analyzed according to specific mechanisms.

From a biological perspective, scientists and doctors explain how genes from both parents contribute to the characteristics of their offspring through genetics. In fact, the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), a self-replicating material present in nearly all living organisms, is a unique identifying part of every individual. It is the main constituent of chromosomes and the carrier of genetic information. No two individuals share the exact same DNA. In forensics, DNA is regarded as a crucial evidence in the resolution of a crime, in medicine, it has been used to determine the paternity or maternity of an individual as well as make way for the intervention and treatment of diseases. The human genome project, carried out for over ten years (1990-2003) was implemented for the purpose of mapping the functions of gene as well as exploring the interactions of nucleotides and their effect on biological processes. This project is beneficial to a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in medicine. Moreover, the study of these minute molecules have advanced the evolutionary study on biological reflex, cognition, affect, and other aspects of the human body.

The study of the human body from a physical perspective paved the way for a fuller understanding of the self, as consciousness, a fundamental core of the self, is influenced by inner dynamics and environments.

Neurophilosophy, attributed to Paul and Patricia Churchland, is concerned with the association of the brain and the mind. In order to understand the workings of the human mind, people must first understand the brain, its functions, and were activity. They further argued that the philosophical notions of free will, common sense, and conscientiousness must be explained in the context of neuroscience as advances in this field seemingly converge with how people think, feel, and behave. Human consciousness, worldviews, beliefs, and other attributes are distinctly connected to brain physiology and functioning. Thus, how the members of the millennial generation, for instance, process information, imbibe beliefs, values, and manifest behaviors in their specific contexts have a neurological basis.

A related standpoint was proposed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who aimed to unite idealism with empiricism. While his overarching framework focused on phenomenology, he also used empirical studies and research to supplement what philosophy failed to cover. With his specific theorem “we are our bodies,” he attempted to





incorporate the physical and the psychological aspects of the self. For Merleau-Ponty, the understanding of the world should not be unidimensional; the “self” is a product of both idealist and realist standpoints.

Psychoneuroimmunology describes the shaping of the self as similar to how the human immune system functions. The human body is made up of nucleotides, the composition of which makes up the DNA. In the context of the immune system, the human bodies “reject” harmful foreign matter and builds up on the existing molecules, leading to a healthy bodily system. However, at times, foreign matter that enters one’s system can be helpful to body maintenance and thus becomes a permanent fixture within the body. In the context of the self, individuals capitalize on their innate attributes and are likely to reject environmental factors assumed to be harmful to the body and its well-being. In discovering oneself, a person is likely to imbibe external experiences that are seen to be helpful and reject those that he or she does not like or derive pleasure from.

Natural science is a fountain of information in understanding oneself, especially in the fields of biology, medicine, cognitive neuroscience, and even chemistry. However, the journey to self-understanding will not be complete without examining the effect of social factors in development.

Social Sciences

While physical science tries to understand the physical nature of people, social sciences are concerned with human functioning in the context of society and social institutions. Psychology, sociology, anthropology, politics, and economics are some of the social sciences that have contributed to the study of the self.

Psychology, defined as the study of human behavior, sees the self as a theoretical construct. In fact, the development of the so-called *Science of Self* roots from various theories and principle. In many theories, the term “self” has been used as an object of several psychological constructs. Such usage of the term does not only indicate an acceptance of its existence but also signify its importance in characterizing human psychological and personal attributes. In the area of personality, for example, **self-awareness** describes the consciousness of individuals about their strengths, weaknesses, potentials, as well as the underlying factors that contribute to such aspects of the self. Perhaps, the closest scientific depiction of the self is expressed in the **self-concept**. It is a description of how one looks like, sounds like, and behaves like. It is an implicit personality theory that one holds towards oneself.

A number of theoretical perspectives to explain the self have been introduced. **Psychoanalysis**, as proposed by Sigmund Freud, focuses on the “unconscious” as a core element of the self. Freud likened the human psyche to an iceberg, whose small tip represents the awareness of the individual and the large part submerged underwater as the “unconscious,” influencing behavior unbeknown to the person. **Behaviorism**, another school of thought, maintains that the study of behavior should be made from an observable and measurable perspective. It largely attributes behavior to environment conditioning. A revised framework of the behavioristic perspective is the **social cognitive theory**, which considers behavior as a function of the environment and internal attributes. Lastly, the **humanistic perspective** draws its assumptions from the observed criticism of psychoanalysis and behaviorism. It believes that every individual has the ability to reach self-actualization and transcendence, and that each person is inherently good or possesses something that is good. The humanistic perspective deviates from the psychoanalytic framework as it focuses on the strengths and inherently good nature of people, instead of the repressed desires of the unconscious in psychoanalysis. From behaviorism, it posits that man has a choice and free will and that he is able to overcome environmental boundaries through human agency. In studying, the self, all three schools of thoughts in psychology explain the nuances of selfhood.

Sociology, meanwhile, is the study of the collective behavior of people within society and focuses on social problems encountered by individuals. It does not see a person on his or her own, but rather, the impact of social institutions and relationships within society on one’s thoughts, feelings, experience, and society. Specific domains of the study within sociology includes family, crime, religion, poverty, education, and the like.

Anthropology is the study of human beings and their ancestors through time and space and in relation to physical character, environmental and social relations, and culture. Whereas sociology is focused on present societal concerns and factors that shape human behavior collectively, anthropology focuses on the evolution of individuals and their societies, as well as specific cultural tools embedded within generations. The progression of human groups, cultural revolutions, evolutionary behavior, and advancement of cultural tools are discussed in anthropology. In studying the self, anthropology examines the developmental advancements society has made and how they have impacted people



who existed within that society. The millennial generation, for example, witnessed the birth of the internet. Having experienced the transition between the analog and digital technologies, they are more adept in using these tools. Thus, to understand one generation, the events and milestone that define this age must be taken into account. The past generations should also be observed.

Political science, in contrast, is concerned with the participation of individuals in establishing a government and making political choices. It is not particular about political affiliations but rather, the factor involved in how one arrives at his or her political choices and behavior. In studying the self, one's participation in government, ideologies, and advocacies are seen as significant contributors to his or her selfhood.

Economics describes and analyzes the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. The manufacture and consumption of goods, the state of finances and purchasing power, and their equitable distribution to society shape the self. Economic activities affect people's value systems and sense of self.

The section outlined the contribution of the sciences in self-understanding and self- discovery. Physical sciences focus on the influences of one's biological make up while social sciences highlight the role of community and society to oneself. It reiterates the issue of nature and nurture discussed in the first section.

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Prepared by:

Edmon Y. Sampana, LPT, PhD
Instructor

Reviewed by:

April Ann L. Galang, LPT
PH/FIC

Approved by:





Glen S. Nolasco, LPT, MSc
Dean

Cf:

Marilyn S. Arcilla, RN, LPT, MAN
OIC-VPAA

