"I am not what I seem to be"

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ABSTRACT. While admiring Professor Wiley's synthesis of Peirce and Mead, I suggest that his decision to model the dialogical self on inner speech is overly cognitive, retains a ghost in the machine, and overly unifies the multiplicity that casts the self into ongoing dialogues.

I am drawn to Professor Wiley's present piece, "Pragmatism and the Dialogical Self," as I was drawn to his *The Semiotic Self*. (Wiley, 1994) His talent for schematics, his economical style, and his historical reach bring needed clarity and scope to our reflections on the self. Moreover, I share his desire to decenter overly thick anthropological concepts without erasing the phenomenon of selfhood, one given in the observation (which performs what it notes), that human beings are dependent, evolving sites of meaning making and agency. Or, to put the matter otherwise, and to use a term from *The Semiotic Self*, humans are "workplaces" that do more than simply express or manifest cultural (or biological) forces; we *inherit* and *reconstruct* them, and thus reproduce them, for better and for worse.

My sympathies are thus squarely with Professor Wiley, and yet, in reading the current essay, I was continually struck by how differently from me Wiley conceives of the dialogical self, even though I too draw heavily from pragmatism in order to articulate its contours and mechanics. In replying, therefore, I've elected to forego more particular, technical issues in favor of explaining, in a more general way, why I have less in common with Wiley than I would have expected, and what those differences might mean for those who would also understand themselves as dialogical phenomena. To be clear, I will not be demonstrating that one should prefer my view to Professor Wiley's. I haven't the space for such a demonstration, and I'm uncertain that, even given the space, I could do so convincingly at all points. So please take what follows as an invitation to a redirection that I will try to motivate with plausible, though not definitive, reasons.[1]

Let me begin by explaining, if only briefly, what makes a theory of the self dialogical. Dialogical theories present the self as a being whose agency and sense of self

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[1] Along the way I will make some use of Wiley's *The Semiotic Self*. It fleshes out his view at points where the present essay left me wondering.

arise from an inter-animating (or dialogical) movement among elements that cannot be reduced to modes of a simpler entity or phenomenon like a soul or transcendental ego. Thus rather than finding within us a self-identical soul or mind responsible for our perceiving, remembering, imagining, desiring, and so forth (to employ the terms of faculty psychology) a dialogical theory finds relatively independent locations of behavior, what many, following Hermans, now term self-positions, whose interaction produces a whole greater than the sum of its parts. (Hermans, 1996a; Hermans, 1996b)

According to Wiley, this inter-animating movement is a kind of inner conversation among three basic, irreducible elements, namely: [1] a present 'I' that is a source of spontaneity and creativity, [2] its former versions, or the 'me,' which, laden with the regard of others, provide the 'I' with some sense of itself, and [3] the future self (or 'you') to which it addresses its thoughts and actions. For example, 'I' am writing this paper, groping for words, revising, seeking concision, etc. Second, as I do so, I am in conversation with several 'me's' (e.g. the one who has read James, Peirce, Mead, and Dewey in and for philosophy classes, the one who has also read Nietzsche as a dialogical theorist, and the one who has co-authored more than a dozen papers with my brother, Paul Lysaker, that use a dialogical conception of the self to better understand schizophrenia). But then I am also doing so in an address to the future, what is now a 'you' that will later be an 'I' (say the one that will read this again tomorrow), as well as an eventual 'me' (say the one who should have done a better job).[2]

Wiley arrives at this model in part through a convincing and an admirable synthesis of Mead and Peirce. Not only does he creatively and convincingly further their thought, but his synthesis brings a multi-dimensional temporality into the heart of the dialogical self, something that goes well-beyond the specious present articulated by James and inherited by Husserl in terms of a living present held together by retention and protention (Husserl, 1893-1917/1991). In my future work, I will certainly make use of this insight.

But what then troubles? Wiley presents dialogue as a matter of inner *speech*, a self organizing its life on the basis of ongoing *conversations* about who it is and what it wants to do. And this strikes me as more a matter of thought than the self, and then, more about a particular kind of thought, namely, self-conscious reflection, than cognition in all its various forms (e.g. pre-reflective schematizations). Now, one might suppose that the structures of reflective thought manifest the structure of the self given that they outline a series of self-world orientations in which we can situate the full range

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[2] In *The Semiotic Self* Wiley admits into this conversation the presence of 'visitors,' i.e. others whose meanings we entertain in our inner conversation, as well as a psychoanalytic-style unconscious that functions as a reservoir of pre-conscious and unconscious feelings and desires that influence our self-conscious conversations and may involve conversations of their own, thus suggesting, I think, that Wiley's triadic conscious self has a structurally analogous doppelganger.

of human action. But I find such a view too cognitive, for it suggests that self-world interaction is a matter of taking up explicit stances towards the world, and that puts Descartes before the horse.

Let me explain. First, every element in Wiley's schema is a mode of the 'I.' The 'me' is a former 'I' and the 'you' is an 'I' to come. This troubles me because it seems to turn a dialogue among relatively discrete moments into a series of designations accomplished by self-consciousness: here I am, there is where I was, and here is where I am going. Said otherwise, Wiley's 'I' retains a ghost in the machine, or so I think when I find him, following James, equating the first-person with the thinker, and, following Mead, identifying it as a source of creativity. (Wiley, 2005: 5; 1994: 50 & 220) With genuine perplexity, I want to ask: why take the first-person, singular pronoun to name such an entity or unified capacity, or to refer to anything at all? My point isn't that it's folk psychology to presume so, but that even phenomenological introspection reveals no such phenomenon. As Hume might say, though he'd speak of perceptions, of course I have desires, memories, emotions, and I find myself rendering judgments, but in none of these phenomenon do I encounter an 'I' that desires, remembers, or judges. True, I experience each as "mine" in some sense —unlike objects of vision, my memories are not given as intersubjectively available phenomena— but I'm far from clear on what this 'mine' indicates. They certainly are not 'mine' in the sense as the products of self-conscious action. In this matter, I have to follow Emerson: "Our being is descending into us from we know not whence." (Porte and Morris, 2001) Now, I am not denying the reality of self-consciousness. But I am denying that the dialogical self can be adequately cast within the confines of self-consciousness, and I take the model of inner speech to be of such a cast.[3]

I have a second substantial concern. Aligning our creativity and spontaneity with a single term elides the multiplicity that we are. Suppose an ex-lover who I've been missing appears unexpectedly in the context of an important business meeting. What follows is not a series of responses assignable to some single 'I,' but the simultaneous rush of multiple reactions lacking a common source: a warm regard for someone missed, an attempt to be professional, shame at still being hung-up on this person, a desire to rekindle some romance, and some calculations about how this new shareholder will influence the will of the group. And note that each directs me down different paths of action —hugs, a hand shake, a nod & smile, keeping with the initial strategy, changing horses mid-stream in order to curry favor, etc. True, I may be partly or even mostly aware of the ensemble, but whatever awareness I have is more passenger than driver, and thus I resist gathering the bundle up in terms of an 'I.'

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[3] For what it is worth, along with Paul Lysaker I have tried to give a dialogical account of first person pronoun use in a recent essay published in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. (Lysaker & Lysaker, 2005)

Now, Wiley may suggest that my emphasis on multiplicity ignores what he terms the "internal solidarity" of our "inner field of meaning." (Wiley, 1994: 222) I confess I find little solidarity amid the manifold meanings that make-up primary experience. True, from a particular point (or self-position) in the array my multiplicity affords, I may come to order my present. For example, my romantic longings may throw caution to the win and I may jeopardize a business deal in order to start up with my former lover. But that is an achievement wrought through and at the expense of the interplay of many possibilities, not an initial solidarity. The point is not insignificant if one takes, as I do, the dialogical self to be a site of discontinuous and contested meanings and directions, more tempest than placid lake.

Interestingly, I think Dewey would support me here. For all intensive purposes, *Human Nature and Conduct* disperses the 'I' into an inter-animating web of habits that are not the accomplishment of an 'I' but "project themselves" to the point of being the lead horse of human conduct, well in front of self-reflective thought and deliberate action (Dewey, 1922/1983, pp. 21-32). True, Dewey does write of inner speech, and he valorizes dramatic rehearsal as a resource for moral deliberation as Wiley notes. But that activity rides atop habitual action, for thought and deed, and thus it is character, the interpenetration of habits, that names Dewey's self, not inner speech.[4] Now, Wiley might recall me to his claim in *The Semiotic Self* that his goal is to "…show, not how the self is constituted, but how it works," but I think Dewey's account of habits elides that distinction, for habits both constitute us and propel the work that we are.

I think other aspects of the self are obscured when we construe its movement in terms of inner speech, for example, embodiment and intersubjectivity, but I have neither the time nor space to elaborate upon these issues, nor do I have at hand Professor Wiley's considered views on such matters. I'll thus close with a most general suggestion. As dialogical theory orients itself towards its future, I too would urge that we take our pragmatist resources most seriously. But I would champion Dewey over James and Peirce in this matter, arguing that inner speech is a facet of the dialogical self, not its core. I suppose one could say that the issue here is the nature of self-positions. Should we regard them as positions adopted consciously or unconsciously by some persistent 'I,' such that an 'I' is the source of movement and animation in the dialogical self, or should self-positions be understood as semi-autonomous forces, an impersonal sea upon which inner speech bobs, doing its best to describe the darting it witnesses as something like a course? I find myself well within the latter.

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[4] At first I was somewhat struck by the small role Dewey plays in Wiley's essay, and by his near absence from *The Semiotic Self*. But upon reflection, I now see that Wiley's focus upon inner speech as co-extensive with the self is at odds with Dewey's far more habitual conception of the ways in which selves work.

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