

## **Editorial**

# **IMAGES OF SELF AND OTHERS**

## **Belonging to and Intertwining in Communities**

According to Wittgenstein, "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes)."<sup>1</sup> That human beings are bodily beings with non-physical dimensions and that they are not solitary individuals but belong to communities are such obvious facts that the articles in this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* reaffirm.

In the fundamental human quest for personal identity, both the philosophical and religious traditions came to the conclusion that body is not a sufficient object of self, though we generally identify human beings referring to physical features. Though I am bodily, I am not my body. If body is not a proper object for self, we feel forced to posit an immaterial substance as that which makes a being a human being. Though Aristotle, and Aquinas following him, argued that the rational soul as the substantial form that makes a being a human being, they did not identify human being with soul. The self is not merely present in the body, but rather very intimately joined so that soul and the body form a composite unit, the unity of which is described differently by different philosophers.

According to Wittgenstein, the concepts relating to the physical and the spiritual relate to each other in a variety of ways in the stream of our life and thought: "The inner is tied up with the outer not only empirically, but also logically."<sup>2</sup> It is not just as an empirical fact but also a logical fact, that human beings are neither bodies nor bodiless selves, but beings with distinctive psychophysical characteristics. Our use of "living human being," as

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<sup>1</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe, trans., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953, 129.

<sup>2</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on The Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. I, (ed) G. H. Von Wright, and Heikki Nyman, (trans.) C. G. Luckhardt and Maximilian A. E. Aue, London: Basil Blackwell, 1990, 63.

Evans observed, “simply spans the gap between the mental and the physical, and is no more intimately connected with one aspect of our self-conception than the other.”<sup>3</sup> “All the peculiarities we have noticed about ‘I’-thoughts are consistent with and, indeed, at points encourage, the idea that there is a living human being which those thoughts concern.”<sup>4</sup>

As we have seen the intimate union of physical and non-physical aspects of human beings, there are complex forms of relations among individuals and communities. Persons are living human beings who are substantially present in the world in collaboration and conversation with fellow human beings. It is a fundamental fact that “we belong to a community;”<sup>5</sup> it is not just a homely reminder of an empirical fact but an existentially fundamental fact of life that is given showing who we are and how we live. Belonging to a community does not mean, however, that an individual is always surrounded by a group of people; it is rather a basic presupposition in our characteristic practices and are fundamental to being and becoming human. Individuals and communities are not contraries nor do they stand at opposite poles. They are related to each other not just empirically but logically. We are not just solitary individuals; we are in collaboration and conversation with other human beings in an inter-subjective world. This is not just something additional and consequent, but something constitutive and existential of being human. The world is made a human world, rather than a biological environment through our co-reflection, conversation and collaboration. As active and free agents living in the world, we realise ourselves not in seclusion but in a life of conversation and collaboration with fellow human beings. Belonging to a community is a fundamental way of our being human.

We fundamentally belong to a community. We live, move and have our being in the physical world, in conversation and

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<sup>3</sup>Evans, G. *The Varieties of Reference*, J. McDowell, ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, 256.

<sup>4</sup>Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, 256.

<sup>5</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, eds., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969, 298.

collaboration with other persons. We are not only the products of nature, but also products and projects of nurture. We have an existential relation to the society as we are formed by a community and form a community. To exist as human is therefore to co-exist and to pro-exist. Others are always present in our being and becoming. One could see a number of modes of human co-existence: Indifference – Concern, Conflict – Unanimity, Exploitation – Promotion, Dependence – Rebellion, Justice –Injustice, and Love – Hate. It is love that makes something personal and intersubjective and genuinely human. Love transforms I-it relation to I-Thou relationship. Love creatively transforms the persons, both the love and the beloved. The experience of being together-in-love is expressed in terms of fulfilment and completeness. Love directs and energizes the process of becoming fully human. It is the relations that define and decide our identities - self and others, and these are not fixed once for all, but dynamic and flexible. Conceptual clarifications on the complex relations between physical and spiritual, natural and cultural, and individual and social in these images of self and others is important in our efforts to know ourselves and to lead meaningful lives.

The first paper, "The Bright Lights on Self Identity and Positive Reciprocity: Spinoza's Ethics of the Other Focusing on Competency, Sustainability and Divine Love" by *Ignace Haaz*, presents the human being in a monistic psycho-dynamical affective framework, instead of a dualistic pedestal above nature, without naturalising the human being in an eliminative materialistic view. Spinoza finds an important entry point in a panpsychist and holistic perspective, presenting the complexity of the human being, which is not reducible to the psycho-physiological conditions of life. From a panpsychist holistic perspective, qualities and values emerge from the world. Human reality, though a social reality, supposes a basis for shared competencies, which author presents as grounded on the sustaining character of the essence of the animal-man as will-to-power. Negatively speaking we all share same asocial tendencies and affects. This aspect is not only negative but it is

also a will to develop and master the environment, because values have an onto-metaphysical immanent dimension in nature, not because there is an individual bottom-up will to survive, but rather a will to live in harmony with the surrounding world. Spinoza understood and described perfectly the power of the mind over the power of the affects, as a co-constituting dimension, which is alienating natural dependencies, leaving an inner space for the objectification of ethical values, not related to mere compensation mechanisms. The author first presents the proto-ethical conditions for the sustainability of life as affective and dynamic grounding into the immanent world, and then the realistic principles of an ethics of competency and sees how far mutual recognition, as the concrete activity of mutually serving each other, has been presented in a convincing way by Spinoza.

A crucial question in a pluralist society is how justice can be done to alterity without endangering thereby one's identity. Roger Burggraeve, a leading Levinasian scholar addresses the question critically and creatively in his excellent essay, "When in the 'Brother' the Stranger is Acknowledged": From Identity to Alterity and Dialogue, According to Emmanuel Levinas." Levinas' dialogical phenomenology of the same and the other, and of responsibility, sets us, according to the author, on the track of 'fraternity' as human condition. As ethical condition of 'solidarity' this fraternity transcends sex and gender, even if the concept is originally rooted in biology. Inspired by Levinas, Burggraeve explains how fraternity attains its full sense when, in the brother, the stranger is acknowledged (and not the opposite: 'when in the stranger the brother is recognized'). This 'ethical fraternity' makes it possible to realize equality in society, and to promote a respectful and authentic inter-religious, or rather 'interconvictional' dialogue. Such an open dialogue, the author concludes, appeals to an asymmetric and reciprocal mastership and critical learning from each other.

Don Adams in his creative reading of Levinas and Spinoza in "The Self and the Other in Levinas and Spinoza" argues that the Spinozan self within the context of his own ethical system,

we find that it also ultimately is other-directed, but in a manner quite distinct from that of the Levinasian self. Levinas himself, however, in his ethics elucidates his key concept of the other-directed self by opposing it to the wholly self-interested self, as he interprets it, in the ethics of Baruch Spinoza. The contrasting ethical selves of Levinas and Spinoza provide alternative models of existing ethically in the world, both of which are in insistent opposition to the modern humanist valorization of the autonomous egoistic individual as a valid ontological concept and worthwhile ethical ideal.

Another comparative study is made by Vinoy Thomas Paikkattu in his essay, "Knowing Self, Identity, and Otherness: An Epistemological Account after Aquinas and Wittgenstein." According to the author, discussions on the self, identity, and the other take an epistemological turn in Aquinas and Wittgenstein. Both of them leave ample space for it notwithstanding their ontological and linguistic philosophies, respectively. The epistemology that can be drawn from them does not limit itself to the 'process of knowledge', rather moves beyond the synthesis of knowledge to the integration of life and actions. The dichotomy between 'self' and the 'other' and the 'inner' and the 'outer' are overcome with the relational epistemology. Systemic epistemology is transformed to relational epistemology where relationality of knowing, acting, and being constitute a linguistic community. Human persons as the members of this community play distinct roles in the human world where other beings also exist.

The final article, "The Self: Metaphysical Reality vs Communicative Device" by Anil Kumar Tewari creatively juxtaposes the non-Buddhist and the Buddhist viewpoints of Indian philosophy on the notion of the self in order to see the rationality behind their conceptions. To pursue this objective, the paper is divided into four sections. The introductory section points to various usages of the expression 'self' in common parlance, which tends to encompass everything that matters to an individual. The second section describes various approaches adopted by the major systems of Indian philosophy towards the

self. It is shown that the conception of the self as a metaphysical substance is more amenable to those Indian philosophical systems that believe in the plurality of individual selves. The third section deals with the Buddhist counter-narrative to the notion of substantive metaphysical self. Since the parsimony of the Buddhist proposal lies in its metaphysical non-proliferation, the linguistic entities such as the self (*jīva*) or soul (*ātman*) purportedly referring to a substantive entity are declared metaphysically vacuous, but the convention of language enables us to pick out the intended referent which is nothing but individual person. Thus the metaphysical concepts of the non-Buddhist systems of Indian philosophy turn out to be a 'communicative device' in Buddhism, without any metaphysical bearing.

Identity of self and others is thus always composite and plural, though it is often used as a simple abstraction as if identities could be defined like chemical formulae. To borrow the analogy of thread by Wittgenstein, "in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres."<sup>6</sup> With sentiments of gratitude to all the collaborators may I have the privilege of presenting to the readers this issue of the *Journal of Dharma*, on "Images of Self and Others: Philosophical Investigations."

**Jose Nandhikkara, Editor-in-Chief**

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<sup>6</sup>Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 167.